The New Book of Martyrs

Georges Duhamel

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DUHAMEL
NEW BOOK OF...

THE NEW BOOK OF MARTYRS

THE NEW BOOK OF MARTYRS

From the French
of
GEORGES DUHAMEL

BY
FLORENCE SIMMONDS

Barry College Library
Miami, Florida

NEW YORK
GEORGE H. DORAN COMPANY

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PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

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THE NEW BOOK OF MARTYRS

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THROUGHOUT OUR LAND

FROM the disfigured regions where the cannon reigns supreme, to the mountains of the South, to the ocean, to the glittering shores of the inland sea, the cry of wounded men echoes throughout the land, and a vast kindred cry seems to rise responsive from the whole world.

There is no French town in which the wounds inflicted on the battle-field are not bleeding. Not one which has not accepted the duty of assuaging something of the sum of suffering, just as it bears its part in the sum of mourning; not one which may not hear within its own walls an echo of the greater lamentation swelling and muttering where the conflict seems to rage unceasingly. The

waves of war break upon the whole surface of the country, and like the incoming tide, strew it with wreckage.

In the beds which the piety of the public has prepared on every side, stricken men await the verdict of fate. The beds are white, the bandages are spotless; many faces smile until the hour when they are flushed with fever, and until that same fever makes a whole nation of wounded tremble on the Continent.

Some one who had been visiting the wounded said to me: "The beds are really very white, the dressings are clean, all the patients seem to be playing cards, reading the papers, eating dainties; they are simple, often very gentle, they don't look very unhappy. They all tell the same story. . . . The war has not changed them much. One can recognise them all."

Are you sure that you recognise them? You have just been looking at them, are you sure that you have seen them?

Under their bandages are wounds you cannot imagine. Below the wounds, in the depths of the mutilated flesh, a soul, strange and furtive, is stirring in feverish exaltation, a soul which

does not readily reveal itself, which expresses itself artlessly, but which I would fain make you understand.

In these days, when nothing retains its former semblance, all these men are no longer those you so lately knew. Suffering has roused them from the sleep of gentle life, and every day fills them with a terrible intoxication. They are now something more than themselves; those we loved were merely happy shadows.

Let us lose none of their humble words, let us note their slightest gestures, and tell me, tell me that we will think of them together, now and later, when we realise the misery of the times and the magnitude of their sacrifice.

THE STORY OF CARRÉ AND LERONDEAU

THEY came in like two parcels dispatched by the same post, two clumsy, squalid parcels, badly packed, and damaged in transit. Two human forms rolled up in linens and woollens, strapped into strange instruments, one of which enclosed the whole man, like a coffin of zinc and wire.

They seemed to be of no particular age; or rather, each might have been a thousand and more, the age of swaddled mummies in the depths of sarcophagi.

We washed, combed, and peeled them, and laid them very cautiously between clean sheets; then we found that one had the look of an old man, and that the other was still a boy.

* * *

Their beds face each other in the same grey room. All who enter it notice them at once; their infinite misery gives them an air of kinship. Compared with them, the other

wounded seem well and happy. And in this abode of suffering, they are kings; their couches are encircled by the respect and silence due to majesty.

I approach the younger man and bend over him.

"What is your name?"

The answer is a murmur accompanied by an imploring look. What I hear sounds like: Mahihehondo. It is a sigh with modulations.

It takes me a week to discover that the boyish patient is called Marie Lerondeau.

The bed opposite is less confused. I see a little toothless head. From out the ragged beard comes a peasant voice, broken in tone, but touching and almost melodious. The man who lies there is called Carré.

* * *

They did not come from the same battlefield, but they were hit almost at the same time, and they have the same wound. Each has a fractured thigh. Chance brought them together in the same distant ambulance, where their wounds festered side by side. Since then they have kept together, till now they lie

enfolded by the blue radiance of the Master's gaze.

He looks at both, and shakes his head silently; truly, a bad business! He can but ask himself which of the two will die first, so great are the odds against the survival of either.

The white-bearded man considers them in silence, turning in his hand the cunning knife.

* * *

We can know nothing till after this grave debate. The soul must withdraw, for this is not its hour. Now the knife must divide the flesh, and lay the ravage bare, and do its work completely.

So the two comrades go to sleep, in that dreadful slumber wherein each man resembles his own corpse. Henceforth we enter upon the struggle. We have laid our grasp upon these two bodies; we shall not let them be snatched from us easily.

* * *

The nausea of the awakening, the sharp agony of the first hours are over, and I begin to discover my new friends.

This requires time and patience. The dressing hour is propitious. The man lies naked on the table. One sees him as a whole, as also those great gaping wounds, the objects of so many hopes and fears.

The afternoon is no less favourable to communion, but that is another matter. Calm has come to them, and these two creatures have ceased to be nothing but a tortured leg and a screaming mouth.

Carré went ahead at once. He made a veritable bound. Whereas Lerondeau seemed still wrapped in a kind of plaintive stupor, Carré was already enfolding me in a deep affectionate gaze. He said:

"You must do all that is necessary."

Lerondeau can as yet only murmur a half articulate phrase:

"Mustn't hurt me."

* * *

As soon as I could distinguish and understand the boy's words, I called him by his Christian name. I would say:

"How are you, Marie?" or "I am pleased with you, Marie."

This familiarity suits him, as does my use of "thee" and "thou" in talking to him. He very soon guessed that I speak thus only to those who suffer most, and for whom I have a special tenderness. So I say to him: "Marie, the wound looks very well to-day." And every one in the hospital calls him Marie as I do.

When he is not behaving well, I say:

"Come, be sensible, Lerondeau."

His eyes fill with tears at once. One day I was obliged to try "Monsieur Lerondeau," and he was so hurt that I had to retract on the spot. However, he now refrains from grumbling at his orderly, and screaming too loudly during the dressing of his wound, for he knows that the day I say to him "Be quiet, Monsieur"—just Monsieur—our relations will be exceedingly strained.

* * *

From the first, Carré bore himself like a man. When I entered the dressing ward, I found the two lying side by side on stretchers which had been placed on the floor. Carré's emaciated arm emerged from under his

blanket, and he began to lecture Marie on the subject of hope and courage. . . . I listened to the quavering voice, I looked at the toothless face, lit up by a smile, and I felt a curious choking in my throat, while Lerondeau blinked like a child who is being scolded. Then I went out of the room, because this was a matter between those two lying on the ground, and had nothing to do with me, a robust person, standing on my feet.

* * *

Since then, Carré has proved that he had a right to preach courage to young Lerondeau.

While the dressing is being prepared, he lies on the ground with the others, waiting his turn, and says very little. He looks gravely round him, and smiles when his eyes meet mine. He is not proud, but he is not one of those who are ready to chatter to every one. One does not come into this ward to talk, but to suffer, and Carré is bracing himself to suffer as decently as possible.

When he is not quite sure of himself, he warns me, saying:

"I am not as strong as usual to-day."

Nine times out of ten, he is "as strong as usual," but he is so thin, so wasted, so reduced by his mighty task, that he is sometimes obliged to beat a retreat. He does it with honour, with dignity. He has just said: "My knee is terribly painful," and the sentence almost ends in a scream. Then, feeling that he is about to howl like the others, Carré begins to sing.

The first time this happened I did not quite understand what was going on. He repeated the one phrase again and again: "Oh, the pain in my knee!" And gradually I became aware that this lament was becoming a real melody, and for five long minutes Carré improvised a terrible, wonderful, heart-rending song on "the pain in his knee." Since then this has become a habit, and he begins to sing suddenly as soon as he feels that he can no longer keep silence.

Among his improvisations he will introduce old airs. I prefer not to look at his face when he begins: "Il n'est ni beau ni grand mon verre." Indeed, I have a good excuse for not looking at it, for I am very busy with his poor leg, which gives me much anxiety,

and has to be handled with infinite precautions.

I do "all that is necessary," introducing the burning tincture of iodine several times. Carré feels the sting; and when, passing by his corner an hour later, I listen for a moment, I hear him slowly chanting in a trembling but melodious voice the theme: "He gave me tincture of iodine."

* * *

Carré is proud of showing courage.

This morning he seemed so weak that I tried to be as quick as possible and to keep my ears shut. But presently a stranger came into the ward. Carré turned his head slightly, saw the visitor, and frowning, began to sing:

"Il n'est ni beau ni grand mon verre."

The stranger looked at him with tears in his eyes, but the more he looked, the more resolutely Carré smiled, clutching the edges of the table with his two quivering hands.

* * *

Lerondeau has good strong teeth. Carré has nothing but black stumps. This distresses

me, for a man with a fractured thigh needs good teeth.

Lerondeau is still at death's door, but though moribund, he can eat. He attacks his meat with a well-armed jaw; he bites with animal energy, and seems to fasten upon anything substantial.

Carré, for his part, is well-inclined to eat; but what can he do with his old stumps?

"Besides," he says, "I was never very carnivorous."

Accordingly, he prefers to smoke. In view of lying perpetually upon his back, he arranged the cover of a cardboard box upon his chest; the cigarette ash falls into this, and Carré smokes without moving, in cleanly fashion.

I look at the ash, the smoke, the yellow, emaciated face, and reflect sadly that it is not enough to have the will to live; one must have teeth.

* * *

Not every one knows how to suffer, and even when we know, we must set about it the right way, if we are to come off with honour. As

soon as he is on the table, Carré looks round him and asks:

"Isn't there any one to squeeze my head to-day?"

If there is no answer, he repeats anxiously:

"Who is going to squeeze my head to-day?"

Then a nurse approaches, takes his head between her hands and presses. . . . I can begin; as soon as some one is "squeezing his head" Carré is good.

Lerondeau's method is different. He wants some one to hold his hands. When there is no one to do this, he shrieks: "I shall fall."

It is no use to tell him that he is on a solid table, and that he need not be afraid. He gropes about for the helpful hands, and cries, the sweat breaking out on his brow: "I know I shall fall." Then I get some one to come and hold his hands, for suffering, at any rate, is a reality. . . .

* * *

Each sufferer has his characteristic cry when the dressing is going on. The poor have only one, a simple cry that does service for them all. It makes one think of the women who,

when they are bringing a child into the world, repeat, at every pain, the one complaint they have adopted.

Carré has a great many varied cries, and he does not say the same thing when the dressing is removed, and when the forceps are applied.

At the supreme moment he exclaims: "Oh, the pain in my knee!"

Then, when the anguish abates, he shakes his head and repeats:

"Oh, that wretched knee!"

When it is the turn of the thigh, he is exasperated.

"Now it's this thigh again!"

And he repeats this incessantly, from second to second. Then we go on to the wound under his heel, and Carré begins:

"Well, what is wrong with the poor heel?"

Finally, when he is tired of singing, he murmurs softly and regularly:

"They don't know how that wretched knee hurts me . . . they don't know how it hurts me."

Lerondeau, who is, and always will be, a little boy compared with Carré, is very poor

in the matter of cries. But when he hears his friend's complaints, he checks his own cries, and borrows them. Accordingly, I hear him beginning:

"Oh, my poor knee! . . . They don't know how it hurts!"

One morning when he was shouting this at the top of his voice, I asked him gravely:

"Why do you make the same complaints as Carré?"

Marie is only a peasant, but he showed me a face that was really offended:

"It's not true. I don't say the same things."

I said no more, for there are no souls so rugged that they cannot feel certain stings.

* * *

Marie has told me the story of his life and of his campaign. As he is not very eloquent, it was for the most part a confused murmur with an ever-recurring protestation:

"I was a good one to work, you know, strong as a horse."

Yet I can hardly imagine that there was once a Marie Lerondeau who was a robust

young fellow, standing firm and erect between the handles of a plough. I know him only as a man lying on his back, and I even find it difficult to picture to myself what his shape and aspect will be when we get him on his feet again.

Marie did his duty bravely under fire. "He stayed alone with the wagons and when he was wounded, the Germans kicked him with their heavy boots." These are the salient points of the interrogatory.

Now and again Lerondeau's babble ceases, and he looks up to the ceiling, for this takes the place of distance and horizon to those who lie upon their backs. After a long, light silence, he looks at me again, and repeats:

"I must have been pretty brave to stay alone with the wagons!"

True enough, Lerondeau was brave, and I take care to let people know it. When strangers come in during the dressings, I show them Marie, who is making ready to groan, and say:

"This is Marie—Marie Lerondeau, you know. He has a fractured thigh, but he is

a very brave fellow. He stayed alone with the wagons."

The visitors nod their heads admiringly, and Marie controls himself. He blushes a little, and the muscles of his neck swell with pride. He makes a sign with his eyes as if to say: "Yes, indeed, alone, all alone with the wagons." And meanwhile, the dressing has been nearly finished.

The whole world must know that Marie stayed alone with the wagons. I intend to pin a report of this on the Government pension certificate.

* * *

Carré was only under fire once, and was hit almost immediately. He is much annoyed at this, for he had a good stock of courage, and now he has to waste it within the walls of a hospital.

He advanced through a huge beetroot field, and he ran with the others towards a fine white mist. All of a sudden, crack, he fell! His thigh was fractured. He fell among the thick leaves, on the waterlogged earth.

Shortly afterwards his sergeant passed again, and said to him:

"We are going back to our trench, they shall come and fetch you later."

Carré merely said:

"Put my haversack under my head."

Evening was coming on; he prepared, gravely, to spend the night among the beetroots. And there he spent it, alone with a cold drizzling rain, meditating seriously until morning.

* * *

It was fortunate that Carré brought such a stock of courage into hospital, for he needs it all. Successive operations and dressings make large drafts upon the most generous supplies.

They put Carré upon the table, and I note an almost joyful resolution in his look. To-day he has "all his strength, to the last ounce."

But just to-day, I have but little to do, not much suffering to inflict. He has scarcely knitted his brows, when I begin to fasten up the apparatus again.

Then Carré's haggard face breaks into a smile, and he exclaims:

"Finished already? Put some more ether on, make it sting a bit at least."

Carré knows that the courage of which there was no need to-day will not, perhaps, be available to-morrow.

* * *

And to-morrow, and for many days after, Carré will have to be constantly calling up those reserves of the soul which help the body to suffer while it waits for the good offices of Nature.

The swimmer adrift on the open seas measures his strength, and strives with all his muscles to keep himself afloat. But what is he to do when there is no land on the horizon, and none beyond it?

This leg, infected to the very marrow, seems to be slowly devouring the man to whom it belongs; we look at it anxiously, and the white-haired Master fixes two small light-blue eyes upon it, eyes accustomed to appraise the things of life, yet, for the moment, hesitant.

I speak to Carré in veiled words of the troublesome, gangrenous leg. He gives a

toothless laugh, and settles the question at once.

"Well, if the wretched thing is a nuisance, we shall have to get rid of it."

After this consent, we shall no doubt make up our minds to do so.

* * *

Meanwhile Lerondeau is creeping steadily towards healing.

Lying on his back, bound up in bandages and a zinc trough, and imprisoned by cushions, he nevertheless looks like a ship which the tide will set afloat at dawn.

He is putting on flesh, yet, strange to say, he seems to get lighter and lighter. He is learning not to groan, not because his frail soul is gaining strength, but because the animal is better fed and more robust.

His ideas of strength of mind are indeed very elementary. As soon as I hear his first cry, in the warm room where his wound is dressed, I give him an encouraging look, and say:

"Be brave, Marie! Try to be strong!"

Then he knits his brows, makes a grimace, and asks:

"Ought I to say 'By God!'?"

The zinc trough in which Marie's shattered leg has been lying has lost its shape; it has become oxydised and is split at the edges; so I have decided to change it.

I take it away, look at it, and throw it into a corner. Marie follows my movements with a scared glance. While I am adjusting the new trough, a solid, comfortable one, but rather different in appearance, he casts an eloquent glance at the discarded one, and his eyes fill with copious tears.

This change is a small matter; but in the lives of the sick, there are no small things.

Lerondeau will weep for the old zinc fragment for two days, and it will be a long time before he ceases to look distrustfully at the new trough, and to criticise it in those minute and bitter terms which only a connoisseur can understand or invent.

* * *

Carré, on the other hand, cannot succeed in carrying along his body by the generous

impulse of his soul. Everything about him save his eyes and his liquid voice foreshadow the corpse. Throughout the winter days and the long sleepless nights, he looks as if he were dragging along a derelict.

He strains at it . . . with his poignant songs and his brave words which falter now, and often die away in a moan.

I had to do his dressing in the presence of Marie. The amount of work to be got through, and the cramped quarters made this necessary. Marie was grave and attentive as if he were taking a lesson, and, indeed, it was a lesson in patience and courage. But all at once, the teacher broke down. In the middle of the dressing, Carré opened his lips, and in spite of himself, began to complain without restraint or measure, giving up the struggle in despair.

Lerondeau listened, anxious and uneasy; and Carré, knowing that Marie was listening, continued to lament, like one who has lost all sense of shame.

* * *

Lerondeau called me by a motion of his eyelids. He said:

"Carré! . . ."

And he added:

"I saw his slough. Lord! he is bad."

Lerondeau has a good memory for medical terms. Yes, he saw Carré's slough. He himself has the like on his posterior and on his heel; but the tear that trembles in the corner of his eye is certainly for Carré.

And then, he knows, he feels that *his* wounds are going to heal.

* * *

But it is bad for Marie to hear another complaining before his own turn.

He comes to the table very ill-disposed. His nerves have been shaken and are unusually irritable.

At the first movement, he begins with sighs and those "Poor devils!" which are his artless and habitual expressions of self-pity. And then, all at once, he begins to scream, as I had not heard him scream for a long time. He screams in a sort of frenzy, opening his mouth widely, and shrieking with all

the strength of his lungs, and with all the strength of his face, it would seem, for it is flushed and bathed in sweat. He screams unreasonably at the lightest touch, in an incoherent and disorderly fashion.

Then, ceasing to exhort him to be calm with gentle and compassionate words, I raise my voice suddenly and order the boy to be quiet, in a severe tone that admits of no parleying. . . .

Marie's agitation subsides at once, like a bubble at the touch of a finger. The ward still rings with my imperious order. A good lady who does not understand at once, stares at me in stupefaction.

But Marie, red and frightened, controls his unreasonable emotion. And as long as the dressing lasts, I dominate his soul strenuously to prevent him from suffering in vain, just as others hold and grasp his wrists.

Then, presently, it is all over. I give him a fraternal smile that relaxes the tension of his brow as a bow is unbent.

* * *

A lady, who is a duchess at the least, came

to visit the wounded. She exhaled such a strong, sweet perfume that she cannot have distinguished the odour of suffering that pervades this place.

Carré was shown to her as one of the most interesting specimens of the house. She looked at him with a curious, faded smile, which, thanks to paint and powder, still had a certain beauty.

She made some patriotic remarks to Carré full of allusions to his conduct under fire. And Carré ceased staring out of the window to look at the lady with eyes full of respectful astonishment.

And then she asked Carré what she could send him that he would like, with a gesture that seemed to offer the kingdoms of the earth and the glory of them.

Carré, in return, gave her a radiant smile; he considered for a moment and then said modestly:

"A little bit of veal with new potatoes."

The handsome lady thought it tactful to laugh. And I felt instinctively that her interest in Carré was suddenly quenched.

* * *

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An old man sometimes comes to visit Carré. He stops before the bed, and with a stony face pronounces words full of an overflowing benevolence.

"Give him anything he asks for. . . . Send a telegram to his family."

Carré protests timidly: "Why a telegram? I have no one but my poor old mother; it would frighten her."

The little old gentleman emerges from his varnished boots like a variegated plant from a double vase.

Carré coughs—first, to keep himself in countenance, and, secondly, because his cruel bronchitis takes this opportunity to give him a shaking.

Then the old gentleman stoops, and all his medals hang out from his tunic like little dried-up breasts. He bends down, puffing and pouting, without removing his gold-trimmed *képi,* and lays a deaf ear on Carre's chest with an air of authority.

* * *

Carré's leg has been sacrificed. The whole limb has gone, leaving a huge and dreadful wound level with the trunk.

It is very surprising that the rest of Carré did not go with the leg.

He had a pretty hard day.

O life! O soul! How you cling to this battered carcase! O little gleam on the surface of the eye! Twenty times I saw it die down and kindle again. And it seemed too suffering, too weak, too despairing ever to reflect anything again save suffering, weakness, and despair.

* * *

During the long afternoon, I go and sit between two beds beside Lerondeau. I offer him cigarettes, and we talk. This means that we say nothing, or very little. . . . But it is not necessary to speak when one has a talk with Lerondeau.

Marie is very fond of cigarettes, but what he likes still better is that I should come and sit by him for a bit. When I pass through the ward, he taps coaxingly upon his sheet, as one taps upon a bench to invite a friend to a seat.

Since he told me about his life at home and his campaign, he has not found much to say

to me. He takes the cakes with which his little shelf is laden, and crunches them with an air of enjoyment.

"As for me," he says, "I just eat all the time," and he laughs.

If he stops eating to smoke, he laughs again. Then there is an agreeable silence. Marie looks at me, and begins to laugh again. And when I get up to go, he says: "Oh, you are not in such a great hurry, we can chat a little longer!"

* * *

Lerondeau's leg was such a bad business that it is now permanently shorter than the other by a good twelve centimetres. So at least it seems to us, looking down on it from above.

But Lerondeau, who has only seen it from afar by raising his head a little above the table while his wounds are being dressed, has noticed only a very slight difference in length between his two legs.

He said philosophically:

"It is shorter, but with a good thick sole. . . ."

When Marie was better, he raised himself on his elbow, and he understood the extent of his injury more clearly.

"I shall want a *very* thick sole," he remarked.

Now that Lerondeau can sit up, he, too, can estimate the extent of the damage from above; but he is happy to feel life welling up once more in him, and he concludes gaily:

"What I shall want is not a sole, but a little bench."

* * *

But Carré is ill, terribly ill.

That valiant soul of his seems destined to be left alone, for all else is failing.

He had one sound leg. Now it is stiff and swollen.

He had healthy, vigorous arms. Now one of them is covered with abscesses.

The joy of breathing no longer exists for Carré, for his cough shakes him savagely in his bed.

The back, by means of which we rest, has also betrayed him. Here and there it is ulcerated; for man was not meant to lie

perpetually on his back, but only to lie and sleep on it after a day of toil.

For man was not really intended to suffer with his miserable, faithless body!

And his heart beats laboriously.

There was mischief in the bowel too. So much so, that one day Carré was unable to control himself, before a good many people who had come in.

In spite of our care, in spite of our friendly assurances, Carré was so ashamed that he wept. He who always said that a man ought not to cry, he who never shed a tear in the most atrocious suffering, sobbed with shame on account of this accident. And I could not console him.

* * *

He no longer listens to all we say to him. He no longer answers our questions. He has mysterious fits of absence.

He who was so dignified in his language, expresses himself and complains with the words of a child.

Sometimes he comes up out of the depths and speaks.

He talks of death with an imaginative lucidity which sounds like actual experience.

Sometimes he sees it. . . . And as he gazes, his pupils suddenly distend.

But he will not, he cannot make up his mind. . . .

He wants to suffer a little longer.

I draw near to his bed in the gathering darkness. His breathing is so light that suddenly, I stop and listen open-mouthed, full of anxiety.

Then Carré suddenly opens his eyes.

Will he sigh and groan? No. He smiles and says:

"What white teeth you have!"

Then he dreams, as if he were dying.

* * *

Could you have imagined such a martyrdom, my brother, when you were driving the plough into your little plot of brown earth?

Here you are, enduring a death-agony of five months swathed in these livid wrappings, without even the rewards that are given to others.

Your breast, your shroud must be bare of even the humblest of the rewards of valour, Carré.

It was written that you should suffer without purpose and without hope.

But I will not let all your sufferings be lost in the abyss. And so I record them thus at length.

* * *

Lerondeau has been brought down into the garden. I find him there, stretched out on a cane chair, with a little *képi* pulled down over his eyes, to shade them from the first spring sunshine.

He talks a little, smokes a good deal, and laughs more.

I look at his leg, but he hardly ever looks at it himself; he no longer feels it.

He will forget it even more utterly after a while, and he will live as if it were natural enough for a man to live with a stiff, distorted limb.

Forget your leg, forget your sufferings, Lerondeau. But the world must not forget them.

And I leave Marie sitting in the sun, with a fine new pink colour in his freckled cheeks.

* * *

Carré died early this morning. Lerondeau leaves us to-morrow.

MEMORIES OF THE MARTYRS

I

WERE modesty banished from the rest of the earth, it would no doubt find a refuge in Mouchon's heart.

I see him still as he arrived, on a stretcher full of little pebbles, with his mud be-plastered coat, and his handsome, honest face, like that of a well-behaved child.

"You must excuse me," he said; "we can't keep ourselves very clean."

"Have you any lice?" asks the orderly, as he undresses him.

Mouchon flushes and looks uneasy.

"Well, if I have, they don't really belong to me."

He has none, but he has a broken leg, "due to a torpedo."

The orderly cuts open his trouser, and I tell him to take off the boot. Mouchon puts out his hand, and says diffidently:

"Never mind the boot."

"But, my good fellow, we can't dress your leg without taking off your boot."

Then Mouchon, red and confused, objects:

"But if you take off the boot, I'm afraid my foot will smell. . . ."

I have often thought of this answer. And believe me, Mouchon, I have not yet met the prince who is worthy to take off your boots and wash your humble feet.

II

With his forceps the doctor lays hold carefully of a mass of bloody dressings, and draws them gently out of a gaping wound in the abdomen. A ray of sunshine lights him at his work, and the whole of the frail shed trembles to the roar of the cannon.

"I am a big china-dealer," murmurs the patient. "You come from Paris, and I do, too. Save me, and you shall see. . . . I'll give you a fine piece of china."

The plugs are coming out by degrees; the forceps glitter, and the ray of sunshine seems to tremble under the cannonade, as

do the floor, the walls, the light roof, the whole earth, the whole universe, drunk with fatigue.

Suddenly, from the depths of space, a whining sound arises, swells, rends the air above the shed, and the shell bursts a few yards off, with the sound of a cracked object breaking.

The thin walls seem to quiver under the pressure of the air. The doctor makes a slight movement of his head, as if to see, after all, where the thing fell.

Then the china-dealer, who noted the movement, says in a quiet voice:

"Don't take any notice of those small things, they don't do any harm. Only save me, and I will give you a beautiful piece of china or earthenware, whichever you like."

III

The root of the evil is not so much the shattered leg, as the little wound in the arm, from which so much good blood was lost.

With his livid lips, no longer distinguishable from the rest of his face, and the immense

black pupils of his eyes, the man shows a countenance irradiated by a steadfast soul, which will not give in till the last moment. He contemplates the ravages of his body almost severely, and without illusion, and watching the surgeons as they scrub their hands, he says in a grave voice:

"Tell my wife that my last thoughts were of her and our children."

Ah! it was not a veiled question, for, without a moment's hesitation, he allows us to put the mask over his face.

The solemn words seem still to echo through the ward:

"Tell my wife . . ."

That manly face is not the face of one who could be deceived by soft words and consoling phrases. The white blouse turns away. The surgeon's eyes grow dim behind his spectacles, and in solemn tones he replies:

"We will not fail to do so, friend."

The patient's eyelids flutter—as one waves a handkerchief from the deck of a departing steamer—then, breathing in the ether steadily, he falls into a dark slumber.

He never wakes, and we keep our promise to him.

IV

A few days before the death of Tricot, a very annoying thing happened to him; a small excrescence, a kind of pimpel, appeared on the side of his nose.

Tricot had suffered greatly; only some fragments of his hands remained; but, above all, he had a great opening in his side, a kind of fetid mouth, through which the will to live seemed to evaporate.

Coughing, spitting, looking about with wide, agonised eyes in search of elusive breath, having no hands to scratch oneself with, being unable to eat unaided, and further, never having the smallest desire to eat—could this be called living? And yet Tricot never gave in. He waged his own war with the divine patience of a man who had waged the great world war, and who knows that victory will not come right away.

But Tricot had neither allies nor reserves; he was all alone, so wasted and so exhausted that the day came when he passed almost

imperceptibly from the state of a wounded to that of a dying man.

And it was just at this moment that the pimple appeared.

Tricot had borne the greatest sufferings courageously; but he seemed to have no strength to bear this slight addition to his woes.

"Monsieur," stammered the orderly who had charge of him, utterly dejected, "I tell you, that pimple is the spark that makes the cup overflow."

And in truth the cup overflowed. This misfortune was too much. Tricot began to complain, and from that moment I felt that he was doomed.

I asked him several times a day, thinking of all his wounds: "How are you, old fellow?" And he, thinking of nothing but the pimple, answered always:

"Very bad, very bad! The pimple is getting bigger."

It was true. The pimple had come to a head, and I wanted to prick it.

Tricot, who had allowed us to cut into his chest without an anæsthetic, exclaimed with tears:

"No, no more operations! I won't have any more operations."

All day long he lamented about his pimple, and the following night he died.

"It was a bad pimple," said the orderly; "it was that which killed him."

Alas! It was not a very "bad pimple," but no doubt it killed him.

V

Mehay was nearly killed, but he did not die; so no great harm was done.

The bullet went through his helmet, and only touched the bone. The brain is all right. So much the better.

No sooner had Mehay come to, and hiccoughed a little in memory of the chloroform, than he began to look round with interest at all that was happening about him.

Three days after the operation, Mehay got up. It would have been useless to forbid this proceeding. Mehay would have disobeyed orders for the first time in his life. We could not even think of taking away his clothes. The brave man never lacks clothes.

Mehay accordingly got up, and his illness was a thing of the past.

Every morning, Mehay rises before daybreak and seizes a broom. Rapidly and thoroughly, he makes the ward as clean as his own heart. He never forgets any corner, and he manages to pass the brush gently under the beds without waking his sleeping comrades, and without disturbing those who are in pain. Sometimes Mehay hands basins or towels, and he is as gentle as a woman when he helps to dress Vossaert, whose limbs are numb and painful.

At eight o'clock, the ward is in perfect order, and as the dressings are about to begin, Mehay suddenly appears in a fine clean apron. He watches my hands carefully as they come and go, and he is always in the right place to hand the dressing to the forceps, to pour out the spirit, or to lend a hand with a bandage, for he very soon learned to bandage skilfully.

He does not say a word; he just looks. The bit of his forehead that shows under his own bandages is wrinkled with the earnestness of his attention—and he has those blue marks by which we recognise the miner.

Sometimes it is his turn to have a dressing. But scarcely is it completed when he is up again with his apron before him, silently busy.

At eleven o'clock, Mehay disappears. He has gone, perhaps, to get a breath of fresh air? Oh, no! Here he is back again with a trayful of bowls. And he hands round the soup.

In the evening he hands the thermometer. He helps the orderlies so much that he leaves them very little to do.

All this time the bones of his skull are at work under his bandages, and the red flesh is growing. But we are not to trouble about that: it will manage all alone. The man, however, cannot be idle. He works, and trusts to his blood, "which is healthy."

In the evening, when the ward is lighted by a night-light, and I come in on tiptoe to give a last look round, I hear a voice laboriously spelling: "B-O, Bo; B-I, Bi; N-E, Ne, Bobine." It is Mehay, learning to read before going to bed.

VI

A lamp has been left alight, because the men are not asleep yet, and they are allowed to smoke for a while. It would be no fun to smoke, unless one could see the smoke.

The former bedroom of the mistress of the house makes a very light, very clean ward. Under the draperies which have been fastened up to the ceiling and covered with sheets, old Louarn lies motionless, waiting for his three shattered limbs to mend. He is smoking a cigarette, the ash from which falls upon his breast. Apologising for the little heaps of dirt that make his bed the despair of the orderlies, he says to me:

"You know, a Breton ought to be a bit dirty."

I touch the weight attached to his thigh, and he exclaims:

"Ma doué! Ma doué! Caste! Caste!"

These are oaths of a kind, of his own coining, which make every one laugh, and himself the first. He adds, as he does every day:

"Doctor, you never hurt me so much before as you have done this time."

Then he laughs again.

Lens is not asleep yet, but he is as silent as usual. He has scarcely uttered twenty words in three weeks.

In a corner, Mehay patiently repeats: "P-A, Pa," and the orderly who is teaching him to read presses his forefinger on the soiled page.

I make my way towards Croin, Octave. I sit down by the bed in silence.

Croin turns a face half hidden by bandages to me, and puts a leg damp with sweat out from under the blankets, for fever runs high just at this time. He too, is silent; he knows as well as I do that he is not going on well; but all the same, he hopes I shall go away without speaking to him.

No. I must tell him. I bend over him and murmur certain things.

He listens, and his chin begins to tremble, his boyish chin, which is covered with a soft, fair down.

Then, with the accent of his province, he says in a tearful, hesitating voice:

"I have already given an eye, must I give a hand too?"

His one remaining eye fills with tears. And seeing the sound hand, I press it gently before I go.

VII

When I put my fingers near his injured eye, Croin recoils a little.

"Don't be afraid," I say to him.

"Oh, I'm not afraid!"

And he adds proudly:

"When a chap has lived on Hill 108, he can't ever be afraid of anything again."

"Then why do you wince?"

"It's just my head moving back of its own accord. I never think of it."

And it is true; the man is not afraid, but his flesh recoils.

When the bandage is properly adjusted, what remains visible of Croin's face is young, agreeable, charming. I note this with satisfaction, and say to him:

"There's not much damage done on this side. We'll patch you up so well that you will still be able to make conquests."

He smiles, touches his bandage, looks at his mutilated arm, seems to lose himself for a while in memories, and murmurs:

"May be. But the girls will never come after me again as they used to. . . ."

VIII

"The skin is beginning to form over the new flesh. A few weeks more, and then a wooden leg. You will run along like a rabbit."

Plaquet essays a little dry laugh which means neither yes nor no, but which reveals a great timidity, and something else, a great anxiety.

"For Sundays, you can have an artificial leg. You put a boot on it. The trouser hides it all. It won't show a bit."

The wounded man shakes his head slightly, and listens with a gentle, incredulous smile.

"With an artificial leg, Plaquet, you will, of course, be able to go out. It will be almost as it was before."

Plaquet shakes his head again, and says in a low voice:

"Oh, I shall never go out!"

"But with a good artificial leg, Plaquet, you will be able to walk almost as well as before. Why shouldn't you go out?"

Plaquet hesitates and remains silent.

"Why?"

Then in an almost inaudible voice he replies:

"I will never go out. I should be ashamed."

Plaquet will wear a medal on his breast. He is a brave soldier, and by no means a fool. But there are very complex feelings which we must not judge too hastily.

IX

In the corner of the ward there is a little plank bed which is like all the other little beds. But buried between its sheets there is the smile of Mathouillet, which is like no other smile.

Mathouillet, after throwing a good many bombs, at last got one himself. In this disastrous adventure, he lost part of his thigh, received several wounds, and gradually became deaf. Such is the fate of bombardier-grenadier Mathouillet.

The bombardier-grenadier has a gentle, beardless face, which for many weeks must have expressed great suffering, and which is now beginning to show a little satisfaction.

But Mathouillet hears so badly that when one speaks to him he only smiles in answer.

If I come into the ward, Mathouillet's smile awaits and welcomes me. When the dressing is over, Mathouillet thanks me with a smile. If I look at the temperature chart, Mathouillet's smile follows me, but not questioningly; Mathouillet has faith in me, but his smile says a number of unspoken things that I understand perfectly. Conversation is difficult, on account of this unfortunate deafness—that is to say, conversation as usually carried on. But we two, happily, have no need of words. For some time past, certain smiles have been enough for us. And Mathouillet smiles, not only with his eyes or with his lips, but with his nose, his beardless chin, his broad, smooth forehead, crowned by the pale hair of the North, with all his gentle, boyish face.

Now that Mathouillet can get up, he eats at the table, with his comrades. To call him

to meals, Baraffe utters a piercing cry, which reaches the ear of the bombardier-grenadier.

He arrives, shuffling his slippers along the floor, and examines all the laughing faces. As he cannot hear, he hesitates to sit down, and this time his smile betrays embarrassment and confusion.

Coming very close to him, I say loudly:

"Your comrades are calling you to dinner, my boy."

"Yes, yes," he replies, "but because they know I am deaf, they sometimes try to play tricks on me."

His cheeks flush warmly as he makes this impromptu confidence. Then he makes up his mind to sit down, after interrogating me with his most affectionate smile.

X

Once upon a time, Paga would have been called *un type;* now he is *un numéro.* This means that he is an original, that his ways of considering and practising life are unusual; and as life here is reduced entirely to terms of

suffering, it means that his manner of suffering differs from that of other people.

From the very beginning, during those hard moments when the wounded man lies plunged in stupor and self-forgetfulness, Paga distinguished himself by some remarkable eccentricities.

Left leg broken, right foot injured, such was the report on Paga's hospital sheet.

Now the leg was not doing at all well. Every morning, the good head doctor stared at the swollen flesh with his little round discoloured eyes and said: "Come, we must just wait till to-morrow."

But Paga did not want to wait

Flushed with fever, his hands trembling, his southern accent exaggerated by approaching delirium, he said, as soon as we came to see him.

"My wish, my wish! You know my wish, doctor."

Then, lower, with a kind of passion:

"I want you to cut it off, you know. I want you to cut this leg. Oh! I shan't be happy till it is done. Doctor, cut it, cut it off."

We didn't cut it at all, and Paga's business was very successfully arranged. I even feel sure that this leg became quite a respectable limb again.

I am bound to say Paga understood that he had meddled with things which did not concern him. He nevertheless continued to offer imperative advice as to the manner in which he wished to be nursed.

"Don't pull off the dressings! I won't have it. Do you hear, doctor? Don't pull. I won't have it."

Then he would begin to tremble nervously all over his body and to say:

"I am quite calm! Oh, I am really calm. See, Michelet, see, Brugneau, I am calm. Doctor, see, I am quite calm."

Meantime the dressings were gradually loosening under a trickle of water, and Paga muttered between his teeth:

"He's pulling, he's pulling. . . . Oh, the cruel man! I won't have it, I won't have it."

Then suddenly, with flaming cheeks:

"That's right. That's right! See, Michelet, see, Brugneau: the dressings have come away. Sergeant, Sergeant, the dressings are loosened."

He clapped his hands, possessed by a furtive joy; then he suddenly became conscious, and with a deep furrow between his brows, he began to give orders again.

"Not any tincture of iodine to-day, doctor. Take away those forceps, doctor, take them away."

Meanwhile the implacable forceps did their work, the tincture of iodine performed its chilly function; then Paga yelled:

"Quickly, quickly. Kiss me, kiss me."

With his arms thrown out like tentacles, he beat upon the air, and seized haphazard upon the first blouse that passed. Then he would embrace it frantically.

Thus it happened that he once showered kisses on Michelet's hands, objects by no means suitable for such a demonstration. Michelet said, laughing:

"Come, stop it; my hands are dirty."

And then poor Paga began to kiss Michelet's bare, hairy arms, saying distractedly:

"If your hands are dirty, your arms are all right."

Alas, what has become of all those who, during days and nights of patient labour, I

saw gradually shaking off the dark empire of the night and coming back again to joy? What has become of the smouldering faggot which an ardent breath finally kindled into flame?

What became of you, precious lives, poor wonderful souls, for whom I fought so many obscure great battles, and who went off again into the realm of adventure?

You, Paga, little fellow, where are you? Do you remember the time when I used to dress your two wounds alternately, and when you said to me with great severity:

"The leg to-day, only the leg. It's not the day for the foot."

XI

Sergeant Lécolle is distinguished by a huge black beard, which fails to give a ferocious expression to the gentlest face in the world.

He arrived the day little Delporte died, and scarcely had he emerged from the dark sleep when, opening his eyes, he saw Delporte die.

I went to speak to him several times. He looked so exhausted, his black beard was so mournful that I kept on telling him: "Sergeant, your wound is not serious."

Each time he shook his head as if to say that he took but little interest in the matter, and tried to close his eyes.

Lécolle is too nervous; he was not able to close his eyes, and he saw Delporte dead, and he had been obliged to witness all Delporte's death agony; for when one has a wound in the right shoulder, one can only lie upon the left shoulder.

The ward was full, I could not change the sergeant's place, and yet I should have liked to let him be alone all day with his own pain.

Now Lécolle is better; he feels better without much exuberance, with a seriousness which knows and foresees the buffetings of Fate.

Lécolle was a stenographer "in life." We are no longer "in life," but the good stenographer retains his principles. When his wounds are dressed, he looks carefully at the little watch on his wrist.

He moans at intervals, and stops suddenly to say:

"It has taken fifty seconds to-day to loosen the dressings. Yesterday, you took sixty-two seconds."

His first words after the operation were:

"Will you please tell me how many minutes I was unconscious?"

XII

I first saw Derancourt in the room adjoining the chapel. A band of crippled men, returning from Germany after a long captivity, had just been brought in there.

There were some fifty of them, all looking with delighted eyes at the walls, the benches, the telephone, all the modest objects in this waiting-room, objects which are so much more attractive under the light of France than in harsh exile.

The waiting-room seemed to have been transformed into a museum of misery: there were blind men, legless and armless men, paralysed men, their faces ravaged by fire and powder.

A big fellow said, lifting his deformed arm with an effort:

"I tricked them; they thought to the end that I was really paralysed. I look well, but that's because they sent us to Constance for the last week, to fatten us up."

A dark, thin man was walking to and fro, towing his useless foot after him by the help of a string which ran down his trouser leg; and he laughed:

"I walk more with my fist than with my foot. Gentlemen, gentlemen, who would like to pull Punch's string?"

All wore strange costumes, made up of military clothing and patched civilian garments.

On a bench sat fifteen or twenty men with about a dozen legs between them. It was among these that I saw Derancourt. He was holding his crutches in one hand and looking round him, stroking his long fair moustache absently.

Derancourt became my friend.

His leg had been cut off at the thigh, and this had not yet healed; he had, further, a number of other wounds which had closed more or less during his captivity.

Derancourt never talked of himself, much less of his misfortune. I knew from his comrades that he had fought near Longwy, his native town, and that he had lain grievously wounded for nine days on the battlefield. He

had seen his father, who had come to succour him, killed at his side; then he had lain beside the corpse, tortured by a delirious dream in which nine days and nine nights had followed one upon the other, like a dizziness of alternate darkness and dazzling light. In the mornings, he sucked the wet grass he clutched when he stretched out his hands.

Afterwards he had suffered in Germany, and finally he had come back to France, mutilated, covered with wounds, and knowing that his wife and children were left without help and without resources in the invaded territory.

Of all this Derancourt said not a word. He apparently did not know how to complain, and he contemplated the surrounding wretchedness with a grave look, full of experience, which would have seemed a little cold but for the tremulous mobility of his features.

Derancourt never played, never laughed. He sought solitude, and spent hours, turning his head slowly from side to side, contemplating the walls and the ceiling like one who sees things within himself.

The day came when we had to operate on Derancourt, to make his stump of a thigh serviceable.

He was laid on the table. He remained calm and self-controlled as always, looking at the preparations for the operation with a kind of indifference.

We put the chloroform pad under his nose; he drew two or three deep breaths, and then a strange thing happened: Derancourt began to sob in a terrible manner, and to talk of all those things he had never mentioned. The grief he had suppressed for months overflowed, or rather, rushed out in desperate, heartrending lamentations.

It was not the disorderly intoxication, the muscular, animal rebellion of those who are thrown into this artificial sleep. It was the sudden break-up of an overstrained will under a slight shock. For months Derancourt had braced himself against despair, and now, all of a sudden, he gave way, and abandoned himself to poignant words and tears. The flood withdrew suddenly, leaving the horrible, chaotic depths beneath the sea visible.

We ceased scrubbing our hands, and stood

aghast and deeply moved, full of sadness and respect.

Then some one exclaimed:

"Quick! quick! More chloroform! Stupefy him outright, let him sleep."

XIII

"But a man can't be paralysed by a little hole in his back! I tell you it was only a bullet. You must take it out, doctor. Take it out, and I shall be all right."

Thus said a Zouave, who had been lying helpless for three days on his bed.

"If you knew how strong I am! Look at my arms! No one could unhook a bag like me, and heave it over my shoulder—tock! A hundred kilos—with one jerk!"

The doctor looked at the muscular torso, and his face expressed pity, regret, embarrassment, and, perhaps, a certain wish to go away.

"But this wretched bullet prevents me from moving my legs. You must take it out, doctor, you must take it out!"

The doctor glances at the paralysed legs,

and the swollen belly, already lifeless. He knows that the bullet broke the spine, and cut through the marrow which sent law and order into all this now inanimate flesh.

"Operate, doctor. Look you, a healthy chap like me would soon get well."

The doctor stammers vague sentences: the operation would be too serious for the present . . . better wait. . . .

"No, no. Never fear. My health is first-rate. Don't be afraid, the operation is bound to be a success."

His rugged face is contracted by his fixed idea. His voice softens; blind confidence and supplication give it an unusual tone. His heavy eyebrows meet and mingle under the stress of his indomitable will; his soul makes such an effort that the immobility of his legs seems suddenly intolerable. Heavens! Can a man *will* so intensely, and yet be powerless to control his own body?

"Oh, operate, operate! You will see how pleased I shall be!"

The doctor twists the sheet round his forefinger; then, hearing a wounded man groan-

ing in the next ward, he gets up, says he will come back presently, and escapes.

XIV

The colloquy between the rival gods took place at the foot of the great staircase.

The Arab soldier had just died. It was the Arab one used to see under a shed, seated gravely on the ground in the midst of other magnificent Arabs. In those days they had boots of crimson leather, and majestic red mantles. They used to sit in a circle, contemplating from under their turbans the vast expanse of mud watered by the skies of Artois. To-day, they wear the ochre helmet, and show the profiles of Saracen warriors.

The Algerian has just been killed, kicked in the belly by his beautiful white horse.

In the ambulance there was a Mussulman orderly, a well-to-do tradesman, who had volunteered for the work. He, on the other hand, was extremely European, nay, Parisian; but a plump, malicious smile showed itself in the midst of his crisp grey beard, and he had the look in the eyes peculiar to those who

come from the other side of the Mediterranean.

Rashid "behaved very well." He had found native words when tending the dying man, and had lavished on him the consolations necessary to those of his country.

When the Algerian was dead, he arranged the winding-sheet himself, in his own fashion; then he lighted a cigarette, and set out in search of Monet and Renaud.

For lack of space, we had no mortuary at the time in the ambulance. Corpses were placed in the chapel of the cemetery while awaiting burial. The military burial-ground had been established within the precincts of the church, close by the civilian cemetery, and in a few weeks it had invaded it like a cancer and threatened to devour it.

Rashid had thought of everything, and this was why he went in search of Monet and Renaud, Catholic priests and ambulance orderlies of the second class.

The meeting took place at the foot of the great staircase. Leaning over the balustrade, I listened, and watched the colloquy of the rival gods.

Monet was thirty years old; he had fine, sombre eyes, and a stiff beard, from which a pipe emerged. Renaud carried the thin face of a seminarist a little on one side.

Monet and Renaud listened gravely, as became people who were deciding in the Name of the Father. Rashid was pleading for his dead Arab with supple eloquence, wrapped in a cloud of tobacco-smoke:

"We cannot leave the Arab's corpse under a wagon, in the storm. . . . This man died for France, at his post. . . . He had a right to all honours, and it was hard enough as it was that he could not have the obsequies he would surely have had in his own country."

Monet nodded approvingly, and Renaud, his mouth half open, was seeking some formula.

It came, and this was it:

"Very well, Monsieur Rashid, take him into the church; that is God's house for every one."

Rashid bowed with perfect deference, and went back to his dead.

Oh, he arranged everything very well! He had made this funeral a personal matter. He was the family, the master of the ceremonies, almost the priest.

The Algerian's body accordingly lay in the chapel, covered with the old faded flag and a handful of chrysanthemums.

It was here the bearers came to take it, and carry it to *consecrated ground,* to lie among the other comrades.

Monet and Renaud were with us when it was lowered into the grave. Rashid represented the dead man's kindred with much dignity. He held something in his hand which he planted in the ground before going away. It was that crescent of plain deal at the end of a stick which is still to be seen in the midst of the worm-eaten crosses, in the shadow of the belfry of L——.

There the same decay works towards the intermingling and the reconciliation of ancient symbols and ancient dogmas.

XV

Nogue is courageous, but Norman; this gives to courage a special form, which excludes neither reserve, nor prudence, nor moderation of language.

On the day when he was wounded, he bore

a preliminary operation with perfect calm. Lifting up his shattered arm, I said:

"Are you suffering very much?" And he barely opened his lips to reply:

"Well . . . perhaps a bit."

Fever came the following days, and with it a certain discomfort. Nogue could not eat, and when asked if he did not feel rather hungry, he shook his head:

"I don't think so."

Well, the arm was broken very high up, the wound looked unhealthy, the fever ran high, and we made up our minds that it was necessary to come to a decision.

"My poor Nogue," I said, "we really can't do anything with that arm of yours. Be sensible. Let us take it off."

If we had waited for his answer, Nogue would have been dead by now. His face expressed great dissatisfaction, but he said neither yes nor no.

"Don't be afraid, Nogue. I will guarantee the success of the operation."

Then he asked to make his will. When the will had been made, Nogue was laid upon the table and operated upon, with-

out having formulated either consent or refusal.

When the first dressing was made, Nogue looked at his bleeding shoulder, and said:

"I suppose you couldn't have managed to leave just a little bit of arm?"

After a few days the patient was able to sit up in an arm-chair. His whole being bore witness to a positive resurrection, but his tongue remained cautious.

"Well, now, you see, you're getting on capitally."

"Hum . . . might be better."

Never could he make up his mind to give his whole-hearted approval, even after the event, to the decision which had saved his life. When we said to him:

"*You're* all right. We've done the business for *you!*" he would not commit himself.

"We shall see, we shall see."

He got quite well, and we sent him into the interior. Since then, he has written to us, "business letters," prudent letters which he signs "a poor mutilated fellow."

XVI

Lapointe and Ropiteau always meet in the dressing ward. Ropiteau is brought in on a stretcher, and Lapointe arrives on foot, jauntily, holding up his elbow, which is going on "as well as possible."

Lying on the table, the dressings removed from his thigh, Ropiteau waits to be tended, looking at a winter fly walking slowly along the ceiling, like an old man bowed down with sorrow.

As soon as Ropiteau's wounds are laid bare, Lapointe, who is versed in these matters, opens the conversation.

"What do they put on it?"

"Well, only yellow spirit."

"That's the strongest of all. It stings, but it is first-rate for strengthening the flesh. I always get ether."

"Ether stinks so!"

"Yes, it stinks, but one gets used to it. It warms the blood. Don't you have tubes any longer?"

"They took out the last on Tuesday."

"Mine have been taken away, too. Wait a minute, old chap, let me look at it. Does it itch?"

"Yes, it feels like rats gnawing at me."

"If it feels like rats, it's all right. Mine feels like rats, too. Don't you want to scratch?"

"Yes, but they say I mustn't."

"No, of course, you mustn't. . . . But you can always tap on the dressing a little with your finger. That is a relief."

Lapointe leans over and examines Ropiteau's large wound.

"Old chap, it's getting on jolly well. Same here; I'll show you presently. It's red, the skin is beginning to grow again. But it is thin, very thin."

Lapointe sits down to have his dressing cut away, then he makes a half turn towards Ropiteau.

"You see—getting on famously."

Ropiteau admires unreservedly.

"Yes, you're right. It looks first-rate."

"And you know . . . such a beastly mess came out of it."

At this moment, the busy forceps cover up

the wounds with the dressing, and the operation comes to an end.

"So long!" says Lapointe to his elbow, casting a farewell glance at it. And he adds, as he gets to the door:

"Now there are only the damned fingers that won't get on. But I don't care. I've made up my mind to be a postman."

XVII

Bouchenton was not very communicative. We knew nothing of his past history. As to his future plans, he revealed them by one day presenting to the head doctor for his signature a paper asking leave to open a Moorish café at Medea after his recovery, a request the head doctor felt himself unable to endorse.

Bouchenton had undergone a long martyrdom in order to preserve an arm from which the bone had been partially removed, but from which a certain amount of work might still be expected. He screamed like the others, and his cry was "Mohabdi! Mohabdi!" When the forceps came near, he cried: "Don't put them in!" And after

this he maintained a silence made up of dignity and indolence. During the day he was to be seen wandering about the wards, holding up his ghostly muffled arm with his sound hand. In the evening, he learned to play draughts, because it is a serious, silent game, and requires consideration.

Now one day when Bouchenton, seated on a chair, was waiting for his wound to be dressed, the poor adjutant Figuet began to complain in a voice that was no more than the shadow of a voice, just as his body was no more than the shadow of a body.

Figuet was crawling at the time up the slopes of a Calvary where he was soon to fall once more, never to rise again.

The most stupendous courage and endurance foundered then in a despair for which there seemed henceforth to be no possible alleviation.

Figuet, I say, began to complain, and every one in the ward feigned to be engrossed in his occupation, and to hear nothing, because when such a man began to groan, the rest felt that the end of all things had come.

Bouchenton turned his head, looked at the

adjutant, seized his flabby arm carefully with his right hand, and set out. Walking with little short steps he came to the table where the suffering man lay.

Stretching out his neck, his great bowed body straining in an effort of attention, he looked at the wounds, the pus, the soiled bandages, the worn, thin face, and his own wooden visage laboured under the stress of all kinds of feelings.

Then Bouchenton did a very simple thing; he relaxed his hold on his own boneless arm, held out his right hand to Figuet, seized his transparent fingers and held them tightly clasped.

The adjutant ceased groaning. As long as the silent pressure lasted, he ceased to complain, ceased perhaps to suffer. Bouchenton kept his right hand there as long as it was necessary.

I saw this, Bouchenton, my brother. I will not forget it. And I saw, too, your aching, useless left arm, which you had been obliged to abandon in order to have a hand to give, hanging by your side like a limp rag.

XVIII

To be over forty years old, to be a tradesman of repute, well known throughout one's quarter, to be at the head of a prosperous provision-dealer's business, and to get two fragments of shell—in the back and the left buttock respectively—is really a great misfortune; yet this is what happened to M. Lévy, infantryman and Territorial.

I never spoke familiarly to M. Lévy, because of his age and his air of respectability; and perhaps, too, because, in his case, I felt a great and special need to preserve my authority.

Monsieur Lévy was not always "a good patient." When I first approached him, he implored me not to touch him "at any price."

I disregarded these injunctions, and did what was necessary. Throughout the process, Monsieur Lévy was snoring, be it said. But he woke up at last, uttered one or two piercing cries, and stigmatised me as a "brute." All right.

Then I showed him the big pieces of cast-iron I had removed from his back and his

buttock respectively. Monsieur Lévy's eyes at once filled with tears; he murmured a few feeling words about his family, and then pressed my hands warmly: "Thank you, thank you, dear Doctor."

Since then, Monsieur Lévy has suffered a good deal, I must admit. There are the plugs! And those abominable india-rubber tubes we push into the wounds! Monsieur Lévy, kneeling and prostrating himself, his head in his bolster, suffered every day and for several days without stoicism or resignation. I was called an "assassin" and also on several occasions, a "brute." All right.

However, as I was determined that Monsieur Lévy should get well, I renewed the plugs, and looked sharply after the famous india-rubber tubes.

The time came when my hands were warmly pressed and my patient said: "Thank you, thank you, dear Doctor," every day.

At last Monsieur Lévy ceased to suffer, and confined himself to the peevish murmurs of a spoilt beauty or a child that has been scolded. But now no one takes him seriously.

He has become the delight of the ward; he laughs so heartily when the dressing is over, he is naturally so gay and playful, that I am rather at a loss as to the proper expression to assume when, alluding to the past, he says, with a look in which good nature, pride, simplicity, and a large proportion of playful malice are mingled:

"I suffered so much! so much!"

XIX

He was no grave, handsome Arab, looking as if he had stepped from the pages of the "Arabian Nights," but a kind of little brown monster with an overhanging forehead and ugly, scanty hair.

He lay upon the table, screaming, because his abdomen was very painful and his hip was all tumefied. What could we say to him? He could understand nothing; he was strange, terrified, pitiable. . . .

At my wits' ends, I took out a cigarette and placed it between his lips. His whole face changed. He took hold of the cigarette delicately between two bony fingers; he had a

way of holding it which was a marvel of aristocratic elegance.

While we finished the dressing, the poor fellow smoked slowly and gravely, with all the distinction of an Oriental prince; then, with a negligent gesture, he threw away the cigarette, of which he had only smoked half.

Presently, suddenly becoming an animal, he spit upon my apron, and kissed my hand like a dog, repeating something which sounded like "Bouia! Bouia!"

XX

Gautreau looked like a beast of burden. He was heavy, square, solid of base and majestic of neck and throat. What he could carry on his back would have crushed an ordinary man; he had big bones, so hard that the fragment of shell which struck him on the skull only cracked it, and got no further into it. Gautreau arrived at the hospital alone, on foot; he sat down on a chair in the corner, saying:

"No need to hurry; it's only a scratch."

We gave him a cup of tea with rum in it, and he began to hum:

En courant par les épeignes
Je m'etios fait un écourchon,
Et en courant par les épeignes
Et en courant après not' couchon.

"Ah!" said Monsieur Boissin, "*you* are a man! Come here, let me see."

Gautreau went into the operating ward saying:

"It feels queer to be walking on dry ground when you've just come off the slime. You see: it's only a scratch. But one never knows: there may be some bits left in it."

Dr. Boussin probed the wound, and felt the cracked bone. He was an old surgeon who had his own ideas about courage and pain. He made up his mind.

"I am in a hurry; you are a man. There is just a little something to be done to you. Kneel down there and don't stir."

A few minutes later, Gautreau was on his knees, holding on to the leg of the table. His head was covered with blood-stained bandages, and Dr. Boussin, chisel in hand, was

tapping on his skull with the help of a little mallet, like a sculptor. Gautreau exclaimed:

"Monsieur Bassin, Monsieur Bassin, you're hurting me."

"Not Bassin, but Boussin," replied the old man calmly.

"Well, Boussin, if you like."

There was a silence, and then Gautreau suddenly added:

"Monsieur Bassin, you are killing me with these antics."

"No fear!"

"Monsieur Bassin, I tell you you're killing me."

"Just a second more."

"Monsieur Bassin, you're driving nails into my head, it's a shame."

"I've almost finished."

"Monsieur Bassin, I can't stand any more."

"It's all over now," said the surgeon, laying down his instruments.

Gautreau's head was swathed with cotton wool and he left the ward.

"The old chap means well," he said, laughing, "but fancy knocking like that . . . with a hammer! It's not that it hurts so

much; the pain was no great matter. But it kills one, that sort of thing, and I'm not going to stand that."

XXI

There is only one man in the world who can hold Hourticq's leg, and that is Monet.

Hourticq, who is a Southerner, cries despairingly: "Oh, cette *jammbe,* cette *jammbe!*" And his anxious eyes look eagerly round for some one: not his doctor, but his orderly, Monet. Whatever happens, the doctor will always do those things which doctors do. Monet is the only person who can take the heel and then the foot in both hands, raise the leg gently, and hold it in the air as long as it is necessary.

There are people, it seems, who think this notion ridiculous. They are all jealous persons who envy Monet's position and would like to show that they too know how to hold Hourticq's leg properly. But it is not my business to show favour to the ambitious. As soon as Hourticq is brought in, I call Monet. If Monet is engaged, well, I wait. He comes, lays hold of the leg, and Hourticq ceases to

lament. It is sometimes a long business, very long; big drops of sweat come out on Monet's forehead. But I know that he would not give up his place for anything in the world.

When Mazy arrived at the hospital, Hourticq, who is no egoist, said to him at once in a low tone:

"Yours is a leg too, isn't it? You must try to get Monet to hold it for you."

XXII

If Bouchard were not so bored, he would not be very wretched, for he is very courageous, and he has a good temper. But he is terribly bored, in his gentle, uncomplaining fashion. He is too ill to talk or play games. He cannot sleep; he can only contemplate the wall, and his own thoughts which creep slowly along it, like caterpillars.

In the morning, I bring a catheter with me, and when Bouchard's wounds are dressed, I apply it, for unfortunately, he can no longer perform certain functions independently.

Bouchard has crossed his hands behind the

nape of his neck, and watches the process with a certain interest. I ask:

"Did I hurt you? Is it very unpleasant?"

Bouchard gives a melancholy smile and shakes his head:

"Oh, no, not at all! In fact it rather amuses me. It makes a few minutes pass. The day is so long. . . ."

XXIII

Thoughts of Prosper Ruffin

. . . God! How awful it is in this carriage! Who is it who is groaning like that? It's maddening! And then, all this would never have happened if they had only brought the coffee at the right time. Well now, a wretched 77 . . . oh, no! Who is it who is groaning like that? God, another jolt! No, no, man, we are not salad. Take care there. My kidneys are all smashed.

Ah! now something is dripping on my nose. Hi! You up there, what's happening? He doesn't answer. I suppose it's blood, all this mess.

Now again, some one is beginning to squeal

like a pig. By the way, can it be me? What! it was I who was groaning! Upon my word, it's a little too strong, that! It was I myself who was making all the row, and I did not know it. It's odd to hear oneself screaming.

Ah! now it's stopping, their beastly motor.

Look, there's the sun! What's that tree over there? I know, it's a Japanese pine. Well, you see, I'm a gardener, old chap. Oh, oh, oh! My back! What will Félicie say to me?

Look, there's Félicie coming down to the washing trough. She pretends not to see me. . . . I will steal behind the elder hedge. Félicie! Félicie! I have a piece of a 77 in my kidneys. I like her best in her blue bodice.

What are you putting over my nose, you people? It stinks horribly. I am choking, I tell you. Félicie, Félicie. Put on your blue bodice with the white spots, my little Féli . . . Oh, but . . . oh, but . . . !

Oh, the Whitsuntide bells already! God—the bells already . . . the Whitsun bells . . . the bells. . . .

XXIV

I remember him very well, although he was not long with us. Indeed I think that I shall never forget him, and yet he stayed such a short time. . . .

When he arrived, we told him that an operation was necessary, and he made a movement with his head, as if to say that it was our business, not his.

We operated, and as soon as he recovered consciousness, he went off again into a dream which was like a glorious delirium, silent and haughty.

His breathing was so impeded by blood that it sounded like groaning; but his eyes were full of a strange serenity. That look was never with us.

I had to uncover and dress his wounds several times; and *those wounds must have suffered.* But to the last, he himself seemed aloof from everything, even his own sufferings.

XXV

"Come in here. You can see him once more."

I open the door, and push the big fair artilleryman into the room where his brother has just died.

I turn back the sheet and uncover the face of the corpse. The flesh is still warm.

The big fellow looks like a peasant. He holds his helmet in both hands, and stares at his brother's face with eyes full of horror and amazement. Then suddenly, he begins to cry out:

"Poor André! Poor André!"

This cry of the rough man is unexpected, and grandiose as the voice of ancient tragedians chanting the threnody of a hero.

Then he drops his helmet, throws himself on his knees beside the death-bed, takes the dead face between his hands and kisses it gently and slowly with a little sound of the lips, as one kisses a baby's hand.

I take him by the arm and lead him away. His sturdy body is shaken by sobs which are

like the neighing of a horse; he is blinded by his tears, and knocks against all the furniture. He can do nothing but lament in a broken voice:

"Poor André! Poor André!"

XXVI

La Gloriette is amongst the pine-trees. I lift up a corner of the canvas and he is there. In spite of the livid patches on the skin, in spite of the rigidity of the features, and the absence for all time of the glance, it is undoubtedly the familiar face.

What a long time he suffered to win the right to be at last this thing which suffers no more!

I draw back the winding-sheet. The body is as yet but little touched by corruption. The dressings are in place, as before. And as before, I think, as I draw back the sheet, of the look he will turn on me at the moment of suffering.

But there is no longer any look, no longer any suffering, no longer even any movements. Only, only unimaginable eternity.

For whom is the damp autumn breeze which flutters the canvas hung before the door? For whom the billowy murmur of the pine-trees and the rays of light crossed by a flight of insects? For whom this growling of cannon mingling now with the landscape like one of the sounds of nature? For me only, for me, alone here with the dead.

The corpse is still so near to the living man that I cannot make up my mind that I am alone, that I cannot make up my mind to think as when I am alone.

For indeed we spent too many days hoping together, enduring together, and if you will allow me to say so, my comrade, suffering together. We spent too many days wishing for the end of the fever, examining the wound, searching after the deeply rooted cause of the disaster—both tremulous, you from the effort to bear your pain, I sometimes from having inflicted it.

We spent so many days, do you remember, oh, body without a soul . . . so many days fondly expecting the medal you had deserved. But it seems that one must have given an eye or a limb to be put on the list, and you, all of

a sudden, you gave your life. The medal had not come, for it does not travel so quickly as death.

So many days! And now we are together again, for the last time.

Well! I came for a certain purpose. I came to learn certain things at last that your body can tell me now.

I open the case. As before, I cut the dressings with the shining scissors. And I was just about to say to you, as before: "If I hurt you, call out."

XXVII

At the edge of the beetroot field, a few paces from the road, in the white sand of Champagne, there is a burial-ground.

Branches of young beech encircle it, making a rustic barrier that shuts out nothing, but allows the eyes and the winds to wander at will. There is a porch like those of Norman gardens. Near the entrance four pine-trees were planted, and these have died standing at their posts, like soldiers.

It is a burial-ground of men.

In the villages, round the churches, or on the fair hill-sides, among vines and flowers, there are ancient graveyards which the centuries filled slowly, and where woman sleeps beside man, and the child beside the grandfather.

But this burial-ground owes nothing to old age or sickness. It is the burial-ground of young, strong men.

We may read their names on the hundreds of little crosses which repeat daily in speechless unison: "There must be something more precious than life, more necessary than life . . . since we are here."

THE DEATH OF MERCIER

MERCIER is dead, and I saw his corpse weep. . . . I did not think such a thing possible.

The orderly had just washed his face and combed his grey hair.

I said: "You are not forty yet, my poor Mercier, and your hair is almost white already."

"It is because my life has been a very hard one, and I have had so many sorrows. I have worked so hard . . . so hard! And I have had so little luck."

There are pitiful little wrinkles all over his face; a thousand disappointments have left indelible traces there. And yet his eyes are always smiling; from out his faded features they shine, bright with an artless candour and radiant with hope.

"You will cure me, and perhaps I shall be luckier in the future."

I say "yes," and I think, "Alas! No, no."

But suddenly he calls me. Great dark hollows appear under the smiling eyes. A livid sweat bathes his forehead.

"Come, come!" he says. "Something terrible is taking hold of me. Surely I am going to die."

We busy ourselves with the poor paralysed body. The face alone labours to translate its sufferings. The hands make the very slightest movement on the sheet. The bullets of the machine-gun have cut off all the rest from the sources of life.

We do what we can, but I feel his heart beating more feebly; his lips make immense efforts to beg for one drop, one drop only from the vast cup of air.

Gradually he escapes from this hell. I divine that his hand makes a movement as if to detain mine.

"Stay by me," he says; "I am afraid."

I stay by him. The sweat no longer stands on his brow. The horrible distress passes off. The air flows again into the miserable breast. The gentle eyes have not ceased to smile.

"You will save me after all," he says;

"I have had too miserable a life to die yet, Monsieur."

I press his hand to give him confidence, and I feel that his hard hand is happy in mine. My fingers have groped in his flesh, his blood has flowed over them, and this creates strong ties between two men.

Calm seems completely restored. I talk to him of his beautiful native place. He was a baker in a village of Le Cantal. I passed through it once as a traveller in peace time. We recall the scent of the juniper-bushes on the green slopes in summer, and the mineral fountains with wonderful flavours that gush forth among the mountains.

"Oh!" he exclaims, "I shall always see you!"

"You will see me, Mercier?"

He is a very simple fellow; he tries to explain, and merely adds:

"In my eyes. . . . I shall always see you in my eyes."

What else does he see? What other thing is suddenly reflected in his eyes?

"I think . . . oh, it is beginning again!"

It is true; the spasm is beginning again.

It is terrible. In spite of our efforts, it overcomes the victim, and this time we are helpless.

"I feel that I am going to die," he says.

The smiling eyes are still fixed imploringly upon me.

"But you will save me, you will save me!"

Death has already laid a disfiguring hand on Mercier.

"Stay by me."

Yes, I will stay by you, and hold your hand. Is there nothing more I can do for you?

His nostrils quiver. It is hard to have been wretched for forty years, and to have to give up the humble hope of smelling the pungent scent of the juniper-bushes once more. . . .

His lips contract, and then relax gradually, so sadly. It is hard to have suffered for forty years, and to be unable to quench one's last thirst with the wonderful waters of our mountain springs. . . .

Now the dark sweat gathers again on the hollow brow. Oh, it is hard to die after forty years of toil, without ever having had leisure

to wipe the sweat from a brow that has always been bent over one's work.

The sacrifice is immense, and we cannot choose our hour; we must make it as soon as we hear the voice that demands it.

The man must lay down his tools and say: "Here I am."

Oh, how hard it is to leave this life of unceasing toil and sorrow!

The eyes still smile feebly. They smile to the last moment.

He speaks no more. He breathes no more. The heart throbs wildly, then stops dead like a foundered horse.

Mercier is dead. The pupils of his eyes are solemnly distended upon a glassy abyss. All is over. I have not saved him. . . .

Then from those dead eyes great tears ooze slowly and flow upon his cheeks. I see his features contract as if to weep throughout eternity.

I keep the dead hand still clasped in mine for several long minutes.

VERDUN

February-April 1916

WE were going northward by forced marches, through a France that was like a mournful garden planted with crosses. We were no longer in doubt as to our appointed destination; every day since we had disembarked at B—— our orders had enjoined us to hasten our advance to the fighting units of the Army Corps. This Army Corps was contracting, and drawing itself together hurriedly, its head already in the thick of the fray, its tail still winding along the roads, across the battle-field of the Marne.

February was closing in, damp and icy, with squalls of sleet, under a sullen, hideous sky, lowering furiously down to the level of the ground. Everywhere there were graves, uniformly decent, or rather according to pattern, showing a shield of tri-colour or black and white, and figures. Suddenly, we came upon immense flats, whence the crosses stretched out their arms between the poplars like men

struggling to save themselves from being engulfed. Many ancient villages, humble, irremediable ruins. And yet here and there, perched upon these, frail cabins of planks and tiles, sending forth thin threads of smoke, and emitting a timid light, in an attempt to begin life again as before, on the same spot as before. Now and again we chanced upon a hamlet which the hurricane had passed by almost completely, full to overflowing with the afflux of neighbouring populations.

Beyond P——, our advance, though it continued to be rapid, became very difficult, owing to the confluence of convoys and troops. The main roads, reserved for the military masses which were under the necessity of moving rapidly, arriving early, and striking suddenly, were barred to us. From every point of the horizon disciplined multitudes converged, with their arsenal of formidable implements, rolling along in an atmosphere of benzine and hot oil. Through this ordered mass, our convoys threaded their way tenaciously and advanced. We could see on the hill sides, crawling like a clan of migrating ants, stretcher-bearers and their dogs drawing

handcarts for the wounded, then the columns of orderlies, muddy and exhausted, then the ambulances, which every week of war loads a little more heavily, dragged along by horses in a steam of sweat.

From time to time, the whole train halted at some cross-road, and the ambulances allowed more urgent things to pass in front of them—things designed to kill, sturdy grey mortars borne along post haste in a metallic rumble.

A halt, a draught of wine mingled with rain, a few minutes to choke over a mouthful of stale bread, and we were off again, longing for the next halt, for a dry shelter, for an hour of real sleep.

Soon after leaving C—— we began to meet fugitives. This complicated matters very much, and the spectacle began to show an odious likeness to the scenes of the beginning of the war, the scenes of the great retreat.

Keeping along the roadsides, the by-roads, the field-paths, they were fleeing from the Verdun district, whence they had been evacuated by order. They were urging on miserable old horses, drawing frail carts, their

wheels sunk in the ruts up to the nave, loaded with mattresses and eiderdowns, with appliances for eating and sleeping, and sometimes too, with cages in which birds were twittering. On they went, from village to village, seeking an undiscoverable lodging, but not complaining, saying merely:

"You are going to Verdun? We have just come from X——. We were ordered to leave. It is very difficult to find a place to settle down in."

Women passed. Two of them were dragging a little baby-carriage in which an infant lay asleep. One of them was quite young, the other old. They held up their skirts out of the mud. They were wearing little town shoes, and every minute they sank into the slime like ourselves, sometimes above their ankles.

All day long we encountered similar processions. I do not remember seeing one of these women weep; but they seemed terrified, and mortally tired.

Meanwhile, the sound of the guns became fuller and more regular. All the roads we caught sight of in the country seemed to be bearing their load of men and of machines.

Here and there a horse which had succumbed at its task lay rotting at the foot of a hillock. A subdued roar rose to the ear, made up of trampling hoofs, of grinding wheels, of the buzz of motors, and of a multitude talking and eating on the march.

Suddenly we debouched at the edge of a wood upon a height whence we could see the whole battle-field. It was a vast expanse of plains and slopes, studded with the grey woods of winter. Long trails of smoke from burning buildings settled upon the landscape. And other trails, minute and multi-coloured, rose from the ground wherever projectiles were raining. Nothing more: wisps of smoke, brief flashes visible even in broad daylight, and a string of captive balloons, motionless and observant witnesses of all.

But we were already descending the incline and the various planes of the landscape melted one after the other. As we were passing over a bridge, I saw in a group of soldiers a friend I had not met since the beginning of the war. We could not stop, so he walked along with me for a while, and we spent these few minutes recalling the things of the past. Then as he

left me we embraced, though we had never done so in times of peace.

Night was falling. Knowing that we were now at our last long lap, we encouraged the worn-out men. At R—— I lost touch with my formation. I halted on the roadside, calling aloud into the darkness. An artillery train passed, covering me with mud to my eyes. Finally, I picked up my friends, and we marched on through villages illumined by the camp fires which were flickering under a driving rain, through a murky country which the flash of cannon suddenly showed to be covered with a multitude of men, of horses, and of martial objects.

It was February 27. Between ten and eleven at night we arrived at a hospital installed in some wooden sheds, and feverishly busy. We were at B——, a miserable village on which next day the Germans launched some thirty monster-shells, yet failed to kill so much as a mouse.

The night was spent on straw, to the stentorian snores of fifty men overcome by fatigue. Then reveillé, and again, liquid mud over the ankles. As the main road was forbidden to

our ambulances there was an excited discussion as a result of which we separated: the vehicles to go in search of a by-way, and we, the pedestrians, to skirt the roads on which long lines of motor-lorries, coming and going, passed each other in haste like the carriages of an immense train.

We had known since midnight where we were to take up our quarters; the suburb of G—— was only an hour's march further on. In the fields, right and left, were bivouacs of colonial troops with muddy helmets; they had come back from the firing line, and seemed strangely quiet. In front of us lay the town, half hidden, full of crackling sounds and echoes. Beyond, the hills of the Meuse, on which we could distinguish the houses of the villages, and the continuous rain of machine-gun bullets. We skirted a meadow strewn with forsaken furniture, beds, chests, a whole fortune which looked like the litter of a hospital. At last we arrived at the first houses, and we were shown the place where we were expected.

* * *

There were two brick buildings of several

storeys, connected by a glazed corridor; the rest of the enclosure was occupied by wooden sheds. Behind lay orchards and gardens, the first houses of the suburb. In front, the wall of a park, a meadow, a railway track, and *La Route,* the wonderful and terrible road that enters the town at this very point.

Groups of lightly wounded men were hobbling towards the hospital; the incessant rush of motors kept up the feverish circulation of a demolished ant-hill.

As we approached the buildings, a doctor came out to meet us.

"Come, come. There's work enough for a month."

It was true. The effluvium and the moans of several hundreds of wounded men greeted us. Ambulance No——, which we had come to relieve, had been hard at it since the night before, without having made much visible progress. Doctors and orderlies, their faces haggard from a night of frantic toil, came and went, choosing among the heaps of wounded, and tended two while twenty more poured in.

While waiting for our material, we went

over the buildings. But a few days before, contagious diseases had been treated here. A hasty disinfection had left the wards reeking with formaline which rasped the throat without disguising the sickly stench of the crowded sufferers. They were huddled round the stoves in the rooms, lying upon the beds of the dormitories, or crouching on the flags of the passages.

In each ward of the lower storey there were thirty or forty men of every branch of the service, moaning and going out from time to time to crawl to the latrines, or, mug in hand, to fetch something to drink.

As we explored further, the scene became more terrible; in the back rooms and in the upper building a number of severely wounded men had been placed, who began to howl as soon as we entered. Many of them had been there for several days. The brutality of circumstances, the relief of units, the enormous sum of work, all combined to create one of those situations which dislocate and overwhelm the most willing service.

We opened a door, and the men who were lying within began to scream at the top of their

voices. Some, lying on their stretchers on the floor, seized us by the legs as we passed, imploring us to attend to them. A few bewildered orderlies hurried hither and thither, powerless to meet the needs of this mass of suffering. Every moment I felt my coat seized, and heard a voice saying:

"I have been here four days. Dress my wounds, for God's sake."

And when I answered that I would come back again immediately, the poor fellow began to cry.

"They all say they will come back, but they never do."

Occasionally a man in delirium talked to us incoherently as we moved along. Sometimes we went round a quiet bed to see the face of the sufferer, and found only a corpse.

Each ward we inspected revealed the same distress, exhaled the same odour of antiseptics and excrements, for the orderlies could not always get to the patient in time, and many of the men relieved themselves apparently unconcerned.

I remember a little deserted room in disorder, on the table a bowl of coffee with bread

floating in it; a woman's slippers on the floor, and in a corner, toilet articles and some strands of fair hair. . . . I remember a corner where a wounded man suffering from meningitis, called out unceasingly: 27, 28, 29 . . . 27, 28, 29 . . . a prey to a strange obsession of numbers. I see a kitchen where a soldier was plucking a white fowl . . . I see an Algerian non-commissioned officer pacing the corridor. . . .

Towards noon, the head doctor arrived followed by my comrades, and our vehicles. With him I made the round of the buildings again while they were unpacking our stores. I had got hold of a syringe, while waiting for a knife, and I set to work distributing morphia. The task before us seemed immense, and every minute it increased. We began to divide it hastily, to assign to each his part. The cries of the sufferers muffled the sound of a formidable cannonade. An assistant at my side, whom I knew to be energetic and resolute, muttered between his teeth: "No! no! Anything rather than war!"

But we had first to introduce some order into our Inferno.

* * *

In a few hours this order appeared and reigned. We were exhausted by days of marching and nights of broken sleep, but men put off their packs and set to work with a silent courage that seemed to exalt even the least generous natures. Our first spell lasted for thirty-six hours, during which each one gave to the full measure of his powers, without a thought of self.

Four operation-wards had been arranged. The wounded were brought in unceasingly, and a grave and prudent mind pronounced upon the state of each, upon his fate, his future. . . . Confronted by the overwhelming flood of work to be done, the surgeon, before seizing the knife, had to meditate deeply, and make a decision as to the sacrifice which would ensure life, or give some hope of life. In a moment of effective thought, he had to perceive and weigh a man's whole existence, then act, with method and audacity.

As soon as one wounded man left the ward, another was brought in; while the prepara-

tions for the operation were being made, we went to choose among and classify the patients beforehand, for many needed nothing more; they had passed beyond human aid, and awaited, numb and unconscious, the crowning mercy of death.

The word "untransportable" once pronounced, directed all our work. The wounded capable of waiting a few hours longer for attention, and of going elsewhere for it were removed. But when the buzz of the motors was heard, every one wanted to go, and men begging to be taken away entered upon their death agony as they assured us they felt quite strong enough to travel. . . .

Some told us their histories; the majority were silent. They wanted to go elsewhere . . . and above all, to sleep, to drink. Natural wants dominated, and made them forget the anguish of their wounds. . . .

I remember one poor fellow who was asked if he wanted anything. . . . He had a terrible wound in the chest, and was waiting to be examined. He replied timidly that he wanted the urinal, and when the orderly hurried to him bringing it, he was dead.

The pressure of urgent duty had made us quite unmindful of the battle close by, and of the deafening cannonade. However, towards evening, the buildings trembled under the fury of the detonations. A little armoured train had taken up its position near us. The muzzle of a naval gun protruded from it, and from moment to moment thrust out a broad tongue of flame with a catastrophic roar.

The work was accelerated at the very height of the uproar. Rivers of water had run along the corridors, washing down the mud, the blood and the refuse of the operation-wards. The men who had been operated on were carried to beds on which clean sheets had been spread. The open windows let in the pure, keen air, and night fell on the hillsides of the Meuse, where the tumult raged and lightnings flashed.

Sometimes a wounded man brought us the latest news of the battle. Between his groans, he described the incredible bombardment, the obstinate resistance, the counter-attacks at the height of the hurly-burly.

All these simple fellows ended their story

with the same words, surprising words at such a moment of suffering:

"They can't get through now. . . .

Then they began to moan again.

During the terrible weeks of the battle, it was from the lips of these tortured men that we heard the most amazing words of hope and confidence, uttered between two cries of anguish.

The first night passed under this stress and pressure. The morning found us face to face with labours still vast, but classified, divided, and half determined.

A superior officer came to visit us. He seemed anxious.

"They have spotted you," he said. "I hope you mayn't have to work upon each other. You will certainly be bombarded at noon."

We had forgotten this prophecy by the time it was fulfilled.

About noon, the air was rent by a screeching whistle, and some dozen shells fell within the hospital enclosure, piercing one of the buildings, but sparing the men. This was the beginning of an irregular but almost continu-

ous bombardment, which was not specially directed against us, no doubt, but which threatened us incessantly.

No cellars. Nothing but thin walls. The work went on.

On the third day a lull enabled us to complete our organisation. The enemy was bombarding the town and the lines persistently. Our artillery replied, shell for shell, in furious salvos; a sort of thunderous wall rose around us which seemed to us like a rampart. . . . The afflux of wounded had diminished. We had just received men who had been fighting in the open country, as in the first days of the war, but under a hail of projectiles hitherto reserved for the destruction of fortresses. Our comrade D—— arrived from the battlefield on foot, livid, supporting his shattered elbow. He stammered out a tragic story: his regiment had held its ground under a surging tide of fire; thousands of huge shells had fallen in a narrow ravine, and he had seen limbs hanging in the thicket, a savage dispersal of human bodies. The men had held their ground, and then had fought. . . .

A quarter of an hour after his arrival

D——, refreshed and strengthened, was contemplating the big wound in his arm on the operating table, and talking calmly of his ruined future. . . .

Towards the evening of this day, we were able to go out of the building, and breathe the unpolluted air for a few minutes.

The noise reigned supreme, as silence reigns elsewhere. We were impregnated, almost intoxicated with it. . . .

A dozen of those captive balloons which the soldiers call "sausages" formed an aerial semi-circle and kept watch.

On the other side of the hills the German balloons also watched in the purple mist to the East.

Night came, and the balloons remained faithfully at their posts. We were in the centre of a circus of fire, woven by all the lightnings of the cannonade. To the south-west, however, a black breach opened, and one divined a free passage there towards the interior of the country and towards silence. A few hundred feet from us, a cross-road continually shelled by the enemy echoed to the shock of projectiles battering the ground

like hammers on an anvil. We often found at our feet fragments of steel still hot, which in the gloom seemed slightly phosphorescent.

* * *

From this day forth, a skilful combination of our hours and our means enabled us to take short spells of rest in turn. However, for a hundred reasons sleep was impossible to me, and for several weeks I forgot what it was to slumber.

I used to retire, then, from time to time to the room set apart for my friend V—— and myself, and lie down on a bed, overcome by a fatigue that verged on stupefaction; but the perpetual clatter of sabots and shoes in the passage kept the mind alert and the eyes open. The chorus of the wounded rose in gusts; there were always in the adjoining wards some dozen men wounded in the head, and suffering from meningitis, which provoked a kind of monotonous howling; there were men wounded in the abdomen, and crying out for the drink that was denied them; there were the men wounded in the chest, and racked by a low cough choked with blood . . . and

all the rest who lay moaning, hoping for an impossible repose. . . .

Then I would get up and go back to work, haunted by the terrible fear that excess of fatigue might have made my eye less keen, my hand less steady than imperious duty required.

At night more especially, the bombardment was renewed, in hurricane gusts.

The air, rent by projectiles, mewed like a furious cat; the detonations came closer, then retired methodically, like the footsteps of a giant on guard around us, above us, upon us.

Every morning the orderlies took advantage of a moment of respite to run and inspect the new craters, and unearth the fuses of shells. . . . I thought of the delightful phrase of assistant-surgeon M—— whom we had attended for a wound on the head, and who said to me as I was taking him back to bed, and we heard the explosions close by:

"Oh, the *marmites* (big shells) always fall short of one."

But to a great many of the wounded, the perpetual uproar was intolerable. They im-

plored us with tears to send them somewhere else; those we kept were, as a fact, unable to bear removal; we had to soothe them and keep them, in spite of everything. Some, overcome by fatigue, slept all day; others showed extraordinary indifference, perhaps due to a touch of delirium, like the man with a wound in the abdomen which I was dressing one morning, and who when he saw me turn my head at the sound of an explosion which ploughed up a neighbouring field, assured me quietly that "those things weren't dangerous."

One night a policeman ran in with his face covered with blood.

He was waving a lantern which he used to regulate the wheeled traffic, and he maintained that the enemy had spotted his lamp and had peppered him with bullets. As a fact, he had only some slight scratches. He went off, washed and bandaged, but only to come back to us the next day dead. A large fragment of iron had penetrated his eye.

There was an entrance ward, where we sorted the cases. Ten times a day we thought

we had emptied this reservoir of misery; but we always found it full again, paved with muddy stretchers on which men lay, panting and waiting.

Opposite to this ante-room was a clearing ward; it seemed less dismal than the other, though it was just as bare, and not any lighter; but the wounded there were clean; they had been operated on, they wore white bandages, they had been comforted with hot drinks and with all sorts of hopes, for they had already escaped the first summons of Death.

Between these two rooms, a clerk lived in the draught, the victim of an accumulation of indispensable and stupefying documents.

In the beginning, the same man sat for three days and three nights chained to this ungrateful task until at last we saw him, his face convulsed, almost mad after unremittingly labelling all this suffering with names and figures.

* * *

The first days of March were chilly, with

alternations of snow and sunshine. When the air was pure, we heard it vibrate with the life of aeroplanes and echo to their contests. The dry throb of machine-guns, the incessant scream of shrapnel formed a kind of crackling dome over our heads. The German aeroplanes overwhelmed the environs with bombs which gave a prolonged whistle before tearing up the soil or gutting a house. One fell a few paces from the ward where I was operating on a man who had been wounded in the head. I remember the brief glance I cast outwards and the screams and headlong flight of the men standing under the windows.

One morning I saw an airship which was cruising over the hills of the Meuse suddenly begin to trail after it, comet-wise, a thick tail of black smoke, and then rush to the earth, irradiated by a burst of flame, brilliant even in the daylight. And I thought of the two men who were experiencing this fall.

The military situation improved daily, but the battle was no less strenuous. The guns used by the enemy for the destruction of men

produced horrible wounds, certainly more severe on the whole than those we had tended during the first twenty months of a war that has been pitiless from its inception. All doctors must have noted the hideous success achieved in a very short time, in perfecting means of laceration. And we marvelled bitterly that man could adventure his frail organism through the deflagrations of a chemistry hardly disciplined as yet, which attains and surpasses the brutality of the blind forces of Nature. We marvelled more especially that flesh so delicate, the product and the producer of harmony, could endure such shocks and such dilapidations without instant disintegration.

Many men came to us with one or several limbs torn off completely, yet they came still living. . . . Some had thirty or forty wounds, and even more. We examined each body systematically, passing from one sad discovery to another. They reminded us of those derelict vessels which let in the water everywhere. And just because these wrecks seemed irredeemably condemned to disaster, we clung to them in the obstinate hope of

bringing them into port and perhaps floating them again.

When the pressure was greatest, it was impossible to undress the men and get them washed properly before bringing them into the operating-ward. The problem was in these cases to isolate the work of the knife as far as possible from the surrounding mud, dirt and vermin: I have seen soldiers so covered with lice that the different parts of the dressings were invaded by them, and even the wounds. The poor creatures apologised, as if they were in some way to blame. . . .

At such moments patients succeeded each other so rapidly that we knew nothing of them beyond their wounds: the man was carried away, still plunged in sleep; we had made all the necessary decisions for him without having heard his voice or considered his face.

We avoided overcrowding by at once evacuating all those on whom we had operated as soon as they were no longer in danger of complications. We loaded them up on the ambulances which followed one upon the other before the door. Some of the patients

came back a few minutes later, riddled with fragments of shell; the driver had not succeeded in dodging the shells, and he was often wounded himself. In like manner the stretcher-bearers as they passed along the road were often hit themselves, and were brought in on their own hand-carts.

One evening there was a "gas warning." Some gusts of wind arrived, bearing along an acrid odour. All the wounded were given masks and spectacles as a precaution. We hung them even on the heads of the beds where dying men lay . . . and then we waited. Happily, the wave spent itself before it reached us.

A wounded man was brought in that evening with several injuries caused by a gas-shell. His eyes had quite disappeared under his swollen lids. His clothing was so impregnated with the poison that we all began to cough and weep, and a penetrating odour of garlic and citric acid hung about the ward for some time.

Many things we had perforce to leave to chance, and I thought, during this alarm, of men just operated on, and plunged in the

stupor of the chloroform, whom we should have to allow to wake, and then mask them immediately, or . . .

* * *

Ah, well! . . . in the midst of all this unimaginable tragedy, laughter was not quite quenched. This phenomenon is perhaps one of the characteristics, one of the greatnesses of our race—and in a more general way, no doubt, it is an imperative need of humanity at large.

Certain of the wounded took a pride in cracking jokes, and they did so in words to which circumstances lent a poignant picturesqueness. These jests drew a laugh from us which was often closely akin to tears.

One morning, in the sorting room, I noticed a big, curly-haired fellow who had lost a foot, and had all sorts of wounds and fractures in both legs. All these had been hastily bound up, clothing and all, in the hollow of the stretcher, which was stiff with blood. When I called the stretcher-bearers and contemplated this picture, the big man raised himself on his elbow and said:

"Please give me a cigarette."

Then he began to smoke, smiling cheerfully and telling absurd stories. We took off one of his legs up to the thigh, and as soon as he recovered consciousness, he asked for another cigarette, and set all the orderlies laughing.

When, on leaving him, I asked this extraordinary man what his calling was, he replied modestly:

"I am one of the employees of the Vichy Company."

The orderlies in particular, nearly all simple folks, had a desire to laugh, even when they were worn out with fatigue, which made a pretext of the slightest thing, and notably of danger. One of them, called Tailleur, a buffoon with the airs of an executioner's assistant, would call out at the first explosions of a hurricane of shells:

"Number your arms and legs! Look out for your nuts! The winkles are tumbling about!"

All my little band would begin to laugh. And I had not the heart to check them, for their faces were drawn with fatigue, and this

moment of doleful merriment at least prevented them from falling asleep as they stood.

When the explosions came very close, this same Tailleur could not help exclaiming:

"I am not going to be killed by a brick! I am going outside."

I would look at him with a smile, and he would repeat: "As for me, I'm off," carefully rolling a bandage the while, which he did with great dexterity.

His mixture of terror and swagger was a perpetual entertainment to us. One night, a hand-grenade fell out of the pocket of one of the wounded. In defiance of orders, Tailleur, who knew nothing at all about the handling of such things, turned it over and examined it for some time, with comic curiosity and distrust.

One day a pig intended for our consumption was killed in the pig-sty by fragments of shell. We ate it, and the finding by one of the orderlies of some bits of metal in his portion of meat gave occasion for a great many jests.

For a fortnight we were unable to go beyond the hospital enclosure. Our longest expedition was to the piece of waste ground which had been allotted to us for a burial ground, a domain the shells were always threatening to plough up. This graveyard increased considerably. As it takes a man eight hours to dig a grave for his brother man, one had to set a numerous gang to work all day, to ensure a place for each corpse.

Sometimes we went into the wooden shed which served as our mortuary. Père Duval, the oldest of our orderlies, sewed there all day, making shrouds of coarse linen for "his dead."

They were laid in the earth carefully, side by side, their feet together, their hands crossed on their breasts, when indeed they still possessed hands and feet. . . . Duval also looked after the human *debris,* and gave it decent sepulture.

Thus our function was not only to tend the living, but also to honour the dead. The care of what was magniloquently termed their "estate" fell to our manager, S——. It was he who put into a little canvas bag all the

papers and small possessions found on the victims. He devoted days and nights to a kind of funereal bureaucracy, inevitable even under the fire of the enemy. His occupation, moreover, was not exempt from moral difficulties. Thus he found in the pocket of one dead man a woman's card which it was impossible to send on to his family, and in another case, a collection of songs of such a nature that after due deliberation it was decided to burn them.

Let us purify the memories of our martyrs!

* * *

We had several German wounded to attend. One of these, whose leg I had to take off, overwhelmed me with thanks in his native tongue; he had lain for six days on ground over which artillery played unceasingly, and contemplated his return to life and the care bestowed on him with a kind of stupefaction.

Another, who had a shattered arm, gave us a good deal of trouble by his amazing uncleanliness. Before giving him the anæsthetic, the orderly took from his mouth a set of false

teeth, which he confessed he had not removed for several months, and which exhaled an unimaginable stench.

I remember, too, a little fair-haired chap of rather chilly demeanour, who suddenly said "Good-bye" to me with lips that quivered like those of a child about to cry.

The interpreter from Headquarters, my friend C——, came to see them all as soon as they had got over their stupor, and interrogated them with placid patience, comparing all their statements in order to glean some trustworthy indication.

* * *

Thus days and nights passed by in ceaseless toil, under a perpetual menace, in the midst of an ever-growing fatigue which gave things the substance and aspects they take on in a nightmare.

The very monotony of this existence was made up of a thousand dramatic details, each of which would have been an event in normal life. I still see, as through the mists of a dream, the orderly of a dying captain sobbing at his bedside and covering his hands with

kisses. I still hear the little lad whose life blood had ebbed away, saying to me in imploring tones: "Save me, Doctor! Save me for my mother!" . . . and I think a man must have heard such words in such a place to understand them aright, I think that every day this man must gain a stricter, a more precise, a more pathetic idea of suffering and of death.

One Sunday evening, the bombardment was renewed with extraordinary violence. We had just sent off General S——, who was smoking on his stretcher, and chatting calmly and cheerfully; I was operating on an infantryman who had deep wounds in his arms and thighs. Suddenly there was a great commotion. A hurricane of shells fell upon the hospital. I heard a crash which shook the ground and the walls violently, then hurried footsteps and cries in the passage.

I looked at the man sleeping and breathing heavily, and I almost envied his forgetfulness of all things, the dissolution of his being in a darkness so akin to liberating death. My task completed, I went out to view the damage.

A shell had fallen on an angle of the building, blowing in the windows of three wards, scattering stones in all directions, and riddling walls and ceilings with large fragments of metal. The wounded were moaning, shrouded in acrid smoke. They were lying so close to the ground that they had been struck only by plaster and splinters of glass; but the shock had been so great that nearly all of them died within the following hour.

The next day it was decided that we should change our domicile, and we made ready to carry off our wounded and remove our hospital to a point rather more distant.

It was a very clear day. In front of us, the main road was covered with men, whom motor vehicles were depositing in groups every minute. We were finishing our final operations and looking out occasionally at these men gathered in the sun, on the slopes and in the ditches. At about one o'clock in the afternoon the air was rent by the shriek of high explosives and some shells fell in the midst of the groups. We saw them disperse through the yellowish smoke, and go to lie down a little

farther off in the fields. Some did not even stir. Stretcher-bearers came up at once, running across the meadow, and brought us two dead men, and nine wounded, who were laid on the operating-table.

As we tended them during the following hour we looked anxiously at the knots of men who remained in the open, and gradually increased, and we asked whether they would not soon go. But there they stayed, and again we heard the dull growl of the discharge, then the whistling overhead, and the explosions of some dozen shells falling upon the men. Crowding to the window, we watched the massacre, and waited to receive the victims. My colleague M—— drew my attention to a soldier who was running up the grassy slope on the other side of the road, and whom the shells seemed to be pursuing.

These were the last wounded we received in the suburb of G——. Three hours afterwards, we took up the same life and the same labours again, some way off, for many weeks more. . . .

Thus things went on, until the day when we, in our turn, were carried off by the automobiles

of the Grand' Route, and landed on the banks of a fair river in a village where there were trees in blossom, and where the next morning we were awakened by the sound of bells and the voices of women.

THE SACRIFICE

WE had had all the windows opened. From their beds, the wounded could see, through the dancing waves of heat, the heights of Berru and Nogent l'Abbesse, the towers of the Cathedral, still crouching like a dying lion in the middle of the plain of Reims, and the chalky lines of the trenches intersecting the landscape.

A kind of torpor seemed to hang over the battle-field. Sometimes, a perpendicular column of smoke rose up, in the motionless distance, and the detonation reached us a little while afterwards, as if astray, and ashamed of outraging the radiant silence.

It was one of the fine days of the summer of 1915, one of those days when the supreme indifference of Nature makes one feel the burden of war more cruelly, when the beauty of the sky seems to proclaim its remoteness from the anguish of the human heart.

We had finished our morning round when an ambulance drew up at the entrance.

"Doctor on duty!"

I went down the steps. The chauffeur explained:

"There are three slightly wounded men. I am going to take on further, and then there are some severely wounded . . ."

He opened the back of his car. On one side three soldiers were seated, dozing. On the other, there were stretchers, and I saw the feet of the men lying upon them. Then, from the depths of the vehicle came a low, grave, uncertain voice which said:

"I am one of the severely wounded, Monsieur."

He was a lad rather than a man. He had a little soft down on his chin, a well-cut aquiline nose, dark eyes to which extreme weakness gave an appearance of exaggerated size, and the grey pallor of those who have lost much blood.

"Oh! how tired I am!" he said.

He held on to the stretcher with both hands as he was carried up the steps. He raised his head a little, gave a glance full of astonishment, distress, and lassitude at the green trees, the smiling hills, the glowing

horizon, and then he found himself inside the house.

Here begins the story of Gaston Léglise. It is a modest story and a very sad story; but indeed, are there any stories now in the world that are not sad?

I will tell it day by day, as we lived it, as it is graven in my memory, and as it is graven in your memory and in your flesh, my friend Léglise.

* * *

Léglise only had a whiff of chloroform, and he fell at once into a sleep closely akin to death.

"Let us make haste," said the head doctor. "We shall have the poor boy dying on the table."

Then he shook his head, adding:

"Both knees! Both knees! What a future!"

The burden of experience is a sorrowful one. It is always sorrowful to have sufficient memory to discern the future.

Small splinters from a grenade make very little wounds in a man's legs; but great disorders may enter by way of those little

wounds, and the knee is such a complicated, delicate marvel!

Corporal Léglise is in bed now. He breathes with difficulty, and catches his breath now and again like a person who has been sobbing. He looks about him languidly, and hardly seems to have made up his mind to live. He contemplates the bottle of serum, the tubes, the needles, all the apparatus set in motion to revive his fluttering heart, and he seems bowed down by grief. He wants something to drink, but he must not have anything yet; he wants to sleep, but we have to deny sleep to those who need it most; he wants to die perhaps, and we will not let him.

He sees again the listening post where he spent the night, in advance of all his comrades. He sees again the narrow doorway bordered by sandbags through which he came out at dawn to breathe the cold air and look at the sky from the bottom of the communication-trench. All was quiet, and the early summer morning was sweet even in the depths of the trench. But some one was watching and listening for the faint sound of his footsteps. An invisible hand hurled a bomb. He rushed

back to the door; but his pack was on his back, and he was caught in the aperture like a rat in a trap. The air was rent by the detonation, and his legs were rent, like the pure air, like the summer morning, like the lovely silence.

* * *

The days pass, and once more, the coursing blood begins to make the vessels of the neck throb, to tinge the lips, and give depth and brilliance to the eye.

Death, which had overrun the whole body like an invader, retired, yielding ground by degrees; but it has halted now, and makes a stand at the legs; these it will not relinquish; it demands something by way of spoil; it will not be baulked of its prey entirely.

We fight for the portion Death has chosen. The wounded Corporal looks on at our labours and our efforts, like a poor man who has placed his cause in the hands of a knight, and who can only be a spectator of the combat, can only pray and wait.

* * *

We shall have to give the monster a share;

one of the legs must go. Now another struggle begins with the man himself. Several times a day I go and sit by his bed. All our attempts at conversation break down one by one. We always end in the same silence and anxiety. To-day Léglise said to me:

"Oh! I know quite well what you're thinking about!"

As I made no answer, he intreated:

"Perhaps we could wait a little longer? Perhaps to-morrow I may be better . . .

Then suddenly, in great confusion:

"Forgive me. I do trust you all. I know what you do is necessary. But perhaps it will not be too late in two or three days. . . ."

Two or three days! We will see to-morrow.

The nights are terribly hot; I suffer for his sake.

I come to see him in the evening for the last time, and encourage him to sleep. But his eyes are wide open in the night and I feel that they are anxiously fixed on mine.

Fever makes his voice tremble.

"How can I sleep with all the things I am thinking about?"

Then he adds faintly:

"Must you? Must you?"

The darkness gives me courage, and I nod my head: "Yes!"

* * *

As I finish his dressings, I speak from the depths of my heart:

"Léglise, we will put you to sleep to-morrow. We will make an examination without letting you suffer, and we will do what is necessary."

"I know quite well that you will take it off."

"We shall do what we must do."

I divine that the corners of his mouth are drawn down a little, and that his lips are quivering. He thinks aloud:

"If only the other leg was all right!"

I have been thinking of that too, but I pretend not to have heard. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.

I spend part of the afternoon sewing pieces of waterproof stuff together. He asks me:

"What are you doing?"

"I am making you a mask, to give you ether."

"Thank you; I can't bear the smell of chloroform."

I answer "Yes, that's why." The real reason is that we are not sure he could bear the brutal chloroform, in his present state.

* * *

Léglise's leg was taken off at the thigh this morning. He was still unconscious when we carried him into the dark room to examine his other leg under the X-rays.

He was already beginning to moan and to open his eyes, and the radiographer was not hurrying. I did all I could to hasten the business, and to get him back into his bed. Thus he regained consciousness in bright sunshine.

What would he, who once again was so close to the dark kingdom, have thought if he had awakened in a gloom peopled by shadows, full of whisperings, sparks and flashes of light?

As soon as he could speak, he said to me:

"You have cut off my leg?"

I made a sign. His eyes filled, and as his head was low, the great tears trickled on to the pillow.

* * *

To-day he is calmer. The first dressings were very painful. He looked at the raw, bloody, oozing stump, trembling, and said:

"It looks pretty horrible!"

We took so many precautions that now he is refreshed for a few hours.

"They say you are to have the Military Medal," the head doctor told him.

Léglise confided to me later, with some hesitation:

"I don't suppose they would really give me the medal!"

"And why not?"

"I was punished; one of my men had some buttons off his overcoat."

Oh, my friend, scrupulous lad, could I love my countrymen if they could remember those wretched buttons for an instant?

"My men!" he said gravely. I look at his narrow chest, his thin face, his boyish forehead with the serious furrow on it of one who accepts all responsibilities, and I do not know how to show him my respect and affection.

* * *

Léglise's fears were baseless. General G——

arrived just now. I met him on the terrace. His face pleased me. It was refined and intelligent.

"I have come to see Corporal Léglise," he said.

I took him into the ward, full of wounded men, and he at once went towards Léglise unhesitatingly, as if he knew him perfectly.

"How are you?" he asked, taking the young man's hand.

"*Mon Général,* they've cut off my leg . . ."

"Yes, yes, I know, my poor fellow. And I have brought you the Military Medal."

He pinned it on to Léglise's shirt, and kissed my friend on both cheeks, simply and affectionately.

Then he talked to him again for a few minutes.

I was greatly pleased. Really, this General is one of the right sort.

* * *

The medal has been wrapped in a bit of muslin, so that the flies may not soil it, and hung on the wall over the bed. It seems to be watching over the wounded man, to be looking on at what is happening. Unfortunately,

what it sees is sad enough. The right leg, the only leg, is giving us trouble now. The knee is diseased, it is in a very bad state, and all we have done to save it seems to have been in vain. Then a sore has appeared on the back, and then another sore. Every morning, we pass from one misery to another, telling the beads of suffering in due order.

So a man does not die of pain, or Léglise would certainly be dead. I see him still, opening his eyes desperately and checking the scream that rises to his lips. Oh! I thought indeed that he was going to die. But his agony demands full endurance; it does not even stupefy those it assails.

I call on every one for help.

"Genest, Barrassin, Prévôt, come, all of you."

Yes, let ten of us do our best if necessary, to support Léglise, to hold him, to soothe him. A minute of his endurance is equal to ten years of such effort as ours.

Alas! were there a hundred of us he would still have to bear the heaviest burden alone.

All humanity at this hour is bearing a very cruel burden. Every minute aggravates its

sufferings, and will no one, no one come to its aid?

* * *

We made an examination of the wounded man, together with our chief, who muttered almost inaudibly between his teeth:

"He must be prepared for another sacrifice."

Yes, the sacrifice is not yet entirely consummated.

But Léglise understood. He no longer weeps. He has the weary and somewhat bewildered look of the man who is rowing against the storm. I steal a look at him, and he says at once in a clear, calm, resolute voice:

"I would much rather die."

I go into the garden. It is a brilliant morning, but I can see nothing, I want to see nothing. I repeat as I walk to and fro:

"He would much rather die."

And I ask despairingly whether he is not right perhaps.

All the poplars rustle softly. With one voice, the voice of Summer itself, they say: "No! No! He is not right!"

A little beetle crosses the path before me.

I step on it unintentionally, but it flies away in desperate haste. It too has answered in its own way: "No, really, your friend is not right."

"Tell him he is wrong," sing the swarm of insects that buzz about the lime-tree.

And even a loud roar from the guns that travels across the landscape seems to say gruffly: "He is wrong! He is wrong!"

* * *

During the evening the chief came back to see Léglise, who said to him with the same mournful gravity:

"No, I won't, Monsieur, I would rather die."

We go down into the garden, and the chief says a strange thing to me:

"Try to convince him. I begin at last to feel ashamed of demanding such a sacrifice from him."

And I too . . . am I not ashamed?

I consult the warm, star-decked night; I am quite sure now that he is wrong, but I don't know how to tell him so. What can I offer him in exchange for the thing I am about to ask him? Where shall I find the words that

induce a man to live? Oh you, all things around me, tell me, repeat to me that it is sweet to live, even with a body so grievously mutilated.

This morning I extracted a little projectile from one of his wounds. He secretly concluded that this would perhaps make the great operation unnecessary, and it hurt me to see his joy. I could not leave him this satisfaction.

The struggle began again; this time it was desperate. For we have no time to lose. Every hour of delay exhausts our man further. A few days more, and there will be no choice open to him: only death, after a long ordeal. . . .

He repeats:

"I am not afraid, but I would rather die."

Then I talk to him as if I were the advocate of Life. Who gave me this right? Who gave me eloquence? The things I said were just the right things, and they came so readily that now and then I was afraid of holding out so sure a promise of a life I am not certain I can preserve, of guaranteeing a future that is not in man's hands.

Gradually, I feel his resistance weakening. There is something in Léglise which involuntarily sides with me and pleads with me. There are moments when he does not know what to say, and formulates trivial objections, just because there are others so much weightier.

"I live with my mother," he says. "I am twenty years old. What work is there for a cripple? Ought I to live to suffer poverty and misery?"

"Léglise, all France owes you too much, she would blush not to pay her debt."

And I promise again, in the name of our country, sure that she will never fall short of what I undertake for her. The whole French nation is behind me at this moment, silently ratifying my promise.

We are at the edge of the terrace; evening has come. I hold his burning wrist in which the feeble pulse beats with exhausted fury. The night is so beautiful, so beautiful! Rockets rise above the hills, and fall slowly bathing the horizon in silvery rays. The lightning of the guns flashes furtively, like a winking eye. In spite of all this, in spite of war, the night is

like waters dark and divine. Léglise breathes it in to his wasted breast in long draughts, and says:

"Oh, I don't know, I don't know! . . . Wait another day, please, please. . . ."

* * *

We waited three whole days, and then Léglise gave in.

"Well, do what you must. Do what you like."

On the morning of the operation, he asked to be carried down to the ward by the steps into the park. I went with him, and I saw him looking at all things round him, as if taking them to witness.

If only, only it is not too late!

Again he was laid on the table. Again we cut through flesh and bones. The second leg was amputated at the thigh.

I took him in my arms to lay him on his bed, and he was so light, so light. . . .

This time when he woke he asked no question. But I saw his hands groping to feel where his body ended.

* * *

A few days have passed since the operation. We have done all it was humanly possible to do, and Léglise comes back to life with a kind of bewilderment.

"I thought I should have died," he said to me this morning, while I was encouraging him to eat.

He added:

"When I went down to the operation-ward, I looked well at everything, and I thought it was for the last time."

"Look, dear boy. Everything is just the same, just as beautiful as ever."

"Oh!" he says, going back to his memories, "I had made up my mind to die."

To make up one's mind to die is to take a certain resolution, in the hope of becoming quieter, calmer, and less unhappy. The man who makes up his mind to die severs a good many ties, and indeed actually dies to some extent.

With secret anxiety, I say gently, as if I were asking a question:

"It is always good to eat, to drink, to breathe, to see the light. . . .

He does not answer. He is dreaming.

I spoke too soon. I go away, still anxious.

* * *

We have some bad moments yet, but the fever gradually abates. I have an impression that Léglise bears his pain more resolutely, like one who has given all he had to give, and fears nothing further.

When I have finished the dressing, I turned him over on his side, to ease his sore back. He smiled for the first time this morning, saying:

"I have already gained something by getting rid of my legs. I can lie on my side now."

But he cannot balance himself well; he is afraid of falling.

Think of him, and you will be afraid with him and for him.

Sometimes he goes to sleep in broad daylight and dozes for a few minutes. He has shrunk to the size of a child. I lay a piece of gauze over his face, as one does to a child, to keep the flies off. I bring him a little bottle of Eau de Cologne and a fan, they help him to bear the final assaults of the fever.

He begins to smoke again. We smoke together on the terrace, where I have had his bed brought. I show him the garden and say: "In a few days, I will carry you down into the garden."

* * *

He is anxious about his neighbours, asks their names, and inquires about their wounds. For each one he has a compassionate word that comes from the depths of his being. He says to me:

"I hear that little Camus is dead. Poor Camus!"

His eyes fill with tears. I was almost glad to see them. He had not cried for so long. He adds:

"Excuse me, I used to see Camus sometimes. It's so sad."

He becomes extraordinarily sensitive. He is touched by all he sees around him, by the sufferings of others, by their individual misfortunes. He vibrates like an elect soul, exalted by a great crisis.

When he speaks of his own case, it is always to make light of his misfortune:

"Dumont got it in the belly. Ah, it's

lucky for me that none of my organs are touched; I can't complain."

I watch him with admiration, but I am waiting for something more, something more. . . .

His chief crony is Legrand.

Legrand is a stonemason with a face like a young girl. He has lost a big piece of his skull. He has also lost the use of language, and we teach him words, as to a baby. He is beginning to get up now, and he hovers round Léglise's bed to perform little services for him. He tries to master his rebellious tongue, but failing in the attempt, he smiles, and expresses himself with a limpid glance, full of intelligence.

Léglise pities him too:

"It must be wretched not to be able to speak."

* * *

To-day we laughed, yes, indeed, we laughed heartily, Léglise, the orderlies and I.

We were talking of his future pension while the dressings were being prepared, and someone said to him:

"You will live like a little man of means."

Léglise looked at his body and answered:

"Oh, yes, a little man, a very little man."

The dressing went off very well. To make our task easier, Léglise suggested that he should hold on to the head of the bed with both hands and throw himself back on his shoulders, holding his stumps up in the air. It was a terrible, an unimaginable sight; but he began to laugh, and the spectacle became comic. We all laughed. But the dressing was easy and was quickly finished.

The stumps are healing healthily. In the afternoon, he sits up in bed. He begins to read and to smoke, chatting to his companions.

I explain to him how he will be able to walk with artificial legs. He jokes again:

"I was rather short before; but now I can be just the height I choose."

* * *

I bring him some cigarettes that had been sent me for him, some sweets and dainties. He makes a sign that he wants to whisper to me, and says very softly:

"I have far too many things. But Legrand is very badly off; his home is in the invaded district, and he has nothing, they can't send him anything."

I understand. I come back presently with a packet in which there are tobacco, some good cigarettes, and also a little note. . . .

"Here is something for Legrand. You must give it to him. I'm off."

In the afternoon I find Léglise troubled and perplexed.

"I can't give all this to Legrand myself, he would be offended."

So then we have to devise a discreet method of presentation.

It takes some minutes. He invents romantic possibilities. He becomes flushed, animated, interested.

"Think," I say, "find a way. Give it to him yourself, from some one or other."

But Léglise is too much afraid of wounding Legrand's susceptibilities. He ruminates on the matter till evening.

* * *

The little parcel is at the head of Legrand's bed. Léglise calls my attention to it with his chin, and whispers:

"I found some one to give it to him. He doesn't know who sent it. He has made all sorts of guesses; it is very amusing!"

Oh, Léglise, can it be that there is still something amusing, and that it is to be kind? Isn't this alone enough to make it worth while to live?

So now we have a great secret between us. All the morning, as I come and go in the ward, he looks at me meaningly, and smiles to himself. Legrand gravely offers me a cigarette; Léglise finds it hard not to burst out laughing. But he keeps his counsel.

The orderlies have put him on a neighbouring bed while they make his. He stays there very quietly, his bandaged stumps in view, and sings a little song, like a child's cradle-song. Then, all of a sudden, he begins to cry, sobbing aloud.

I put my arm round him and ask anxiously:

"Why? What is the matter?"

Then he answers in a broken voice:

"I am crying with joy and thankfulness."

Oh! I did not expect so much. But I am very happy, much comforted. I kiss him, he kisses me, and I think I cried a little too.

* * *

I have wrapped him in a flannel dressing-

gown, and I carry him in my arms. I go down the steps to the park very carefully, like a mother carrying her new-born babe for the first time, and I call out: "An arm-chair! An arm-chair."

He clings to my neck as I walk, and says in some confusion:

"I shall tire you."

No indeed! I am too well pleased. I would not let any one take my place. The arm-chair has been set under the trees, near a grove. I deposit Léglise among the cushions. They bring him a *képi*. He breathes the scent of green things, of the newly mown lawns, of the warm gravel. He looks at the façade of the mansion, and says:

"I had not even seen the place where I very nearly died."

All the wounded who are walking about come and visit him; they almost seem to be paying him homage. He talks to them with a cordial authority. Is he not the chief among them, in virtue of his sufferings and his sacrifice?

* * *

Some one in the ward was talking this

morning of love and marriage, and a home.

I glanced at Léglise now and then; he seemed to be dreaming and he murmured:

"Oh, for me, now . . ."

Then I told him something I knew: I know young girls who have sworn to marry only a mutilated man. Well, we must believe in the vows of these young girls. France is a country richer in warmth of heart than in any other virtue. It is a blessed duty to give happiness to those who have sacrificed so much. And a thousand hearts, the generous hearts of women, applaud me at this moment.

Léglise listens, shaking his head. He does not venture to say "No."

* * *

Léglise has not only the Military Medal, but also the War Cross. The notice has just come. He reads it with blushes.

"I shall never dare to show this," he says; "it is a good deal exaggerated."

He hands me the paper, which states, in substance, that Corporal Léglise behaved with great gallantry under a hail of bombs, and that his left leg has been amputated.

"I didn't behave with great gallantry," he says; "I was at my post, that's all. As to the bombs, I only got one."

I reject this point of view summarily.

"Wasn't it a gallant act to go to that advanced post, so near the enemy, all alone, at the head of all the Frenchmen? Weren't they all behind you, to the very end of the country, right away to the Pyrenees? Did they not all rely on your coolness, your keen sight, your vigilance? You were only hit by one bomb, but I think you might have had several, and still be with us. And besides, the notice, far from being exaggerated, is really insufficient; it says you have lost a leg, whereas you have lost two! It seems to me that this fully compensates for anything excessive with regard to the bombs."

"That's true!" agrees Léglise, laughing. "But I don't want to be made out a hero."

"My good lad, people won't ask what you think before they appreciate and honour you. It will be quite enough to look at your body."

* * *

Then we had to part, for the war goes on, and every day there are fresh wounded.

Léglise left us nearly cured. He left with some comrades, and he was not the least lively of the group.

"I was the most severely wounded man in the train," he wrote to me, not without a certain pride.

Since then, Léglise has written to me often. His letters breathe a contented calm. I receive them among the vicissitudes of the campaign; on the highways, in wards where other wounded men are moaning, in fields scoured by the gallop of the cannonade.

And always something beside me murmurs, mutely:

"You see, you see, he was wrong when he said he would rather die."

I am convinced of it, and this is why I have told your story. You will forgive me, won't you, Léglise, my friend?

THE THIRD SYMPHONY

EVERY morning the stretcher-bearers brought Vize-Feldwebel Spät down to the dressing ward, and his appearance always introduced a certain chill in the atmosphere.

There are some German wounded whom kind treatment, suffering, or some more obscure agency move to composition with the enemy, and who receive what we do for them with a certain amount of gratitude. Spät was not one of these. For weeks we had made strenuous efforts to snatch him from death, and then to alleviate his sufferings, without eliciting the slightest sign of satisfaction from him, or receiving the least word of thanks.

He could speak a little French, which he utilised strictly for his material wants, to say, for instance, "A little more cotton-wool under the foot, Monsieur," or, "Have I any fever to-day?"

Apart from this, he always showed us the same icy face, the same pale, hard eyes, en-

framed by colourless lashes. We gathered, from certain indications, that the man was intelligent and well educated; but he was obviously under the domination of a lively hatred, and a strict sense of his own dignity.

He bore pain bravely, and like one who makes it a point of honour to repress the most excusable reactions of the martyred flesh. I do not remember ever hearing him cry out, though this would have seemed to me natural enough, and would by no means have lowered Monsieur Spät in my opinion. All I ever heard from him was a stifled moan, the dull panting of the woodman as he swings his axe.

One day we were obliged to give him an anæsthetic in order to make incisions in the wounds in his leg; he turned very red and said, in a tone that was almost imploring: "You won't cut it off, gentlemen, will you?" But no sooner did he regain consciousness than he at once resumed his attitude of stiff hostility.

After a time, I ceased to believe that his features could ever express anything but this repressed animosity. I was undeceived by an unforeseen incident.

The habit of whistling between one's teeth is a token, with me as with many other persons, of a certain absorption. It is perhaps rather a vulgar habit, but I often feel impelled to whistle, especially when I have a serious piece of work in hand.

One morning accordingly, I was finishing Vize-Feldwebel Spät's dressing, and whistling something at random. I was looking at his leg, and was paying no attention to his face, when I suddenly became curiously aware that the look he had fixed upon me had changed in quality, and I raised my eyes.

Certainly, something very extraordinary had taken place: the German's face glowed with a kind of warmth and contentment, and was so smiling and radiant that I hardly recognised it. I could scarcely believe that he had been able to improvise this face, which was sensitive and trustful, out of the features he generally showed us.

"Tell me, Monsieur," he murmured, "it's the Third Symphony, isn't it, that you are . . . what do you call it?—yes . . . whistling.

First, I stopped whistling. Then I answered: "Yes, I believe it is the Third

Symphony"; then I remained silent and confused.

A slender bridge had just been flung across the abyss.

The thing lasted for a few seconds, and I was still dreaming of it when once more I felt an icy, irrevocable shadow falling upon me—the hostile glance of Herr Spät.

GRACE

IT is a common saying that all men are equal in the presence of suffering, but I know very well that this is not true.

Auger! Auger! humble basket-maker of La Charente, who are you, you who seem able to suffer without being unhappy? Why are you touched with grace, whereas Grégoire is not? Why are you the prince of a world in which Grégoire is merely a pariah?

Kind ladies who pass through the wards where the wounded lie, and give them cigarettes and sweet-meats, come with me.

We will go through the large ward on the first floor, where the windows are caressed by the boughs of chestnut-trees. I will not point out Auger, you will give him the lion's share of the cigarettes and sweets of your own accord; but if I don't point out Grégoire, you will leave without noticing him, and he will get no sweets, and will have nothing to smoke.

* * *

It is not because of this that I call Grégoire

a pariah. It is because of a much sadder and more intimate thing . . . Grégoire lacks endurance, he is not what we call a good patient.

In a general way those who tend the wounded call the men who do not give them much trouble "good patients." Judged by this standard, every one in the hospital will tell you that Grégoire is not a good patient.

All day long, he lies on his left side, because of his wound, and stares at the wall. I said to him a day or two after he came:

"I am going to move you and put you over in the other corner; there you will be able to see your comrades."

He answered, in his dull, surly voice:

"It's not worth while. I'm all right here."

"But you can see nothing but the wall."

"That's quite enough."

Scarcely have the stretcher-bearers touched his bed, when Grégoire begins to cry out in a doleful, irritable tone:

"Ah! don't shake me like that! Ah, you mustn't touch me."

The stretcher-bearers I give him are very gentle fellows, and he always has the same: Paffin, a fat shoe-maker with a stammer, and

Monsieur Bouin, a professor of mathematics, with a grey beard and very precise movements.

They take hold of Grégoire most carefully to lay him on the stretcher. The wounded man criticises all their movements peevishly:

"Ah! don't turn me over like that. And you must hold my leg better than that!"

The sweat breaks out on Paffin's face. Monsieur Bouin's eye-glasses fall off. At last they bring the patient along.

As soon as he comes into the dressing ward, Grégoire is pale and perspiring. His harsh tawny beard quivers, hair by hair. I divine all this, and say a few words of encouragement to him from afar.

"I shan't be long with you this morning, Grégoire. You won't have time to say 'oof'!"

He preserves a sulky silence, full of reservations. He looks like a condemned criminal awaiting execution. He is so pre-occupied that he does not even answer when the sarcastic Sergeant says as he passes him:

"Ah! here's our grouser."

At last he is laid on the table which the wounded men call the "billiard-table."

Then, things become very trying. I feel at once that whatever I do, Grégoire will suffer. I uncover the wound in his thigh, and he screams. I wash the wound carefully, and he screams. I probe the wound, from which I remove small particles of bone, very gently, and he utters unimaginable yells. I see his tongue trembling in his open mouth. His hands tremble in the hands that hold them. I have an impression that every fibre of his body trembles, that the raw flesh of the wound trembles and retracts. In spite of my determination, this misery affects me, and I wonder whether I too shall begin to tremble sympathetically. I say:

"Try to be patient, my poor Grégoire."

He replies in a voice hoarse with pain and terror: "I can't help it."

I add, just to say something: "Courage, a little courage."

He does not even answer, and I feel that to exhort him to show courage, is to recommend an impossible thing, as if I were to advise him to have black eyes instead of his pale blue ones.

The dressing is completed in an atmosphere

of general discomfort. Nothing could persuade me that Grégoire does not cordially detest me at this moment. While they are carrying him away, I ask myself bitterly why Grégoire is so deficient in grace, why he cannot suffer decently?

The Sergeant says, as he sponges the table: "He's working against one all the time."

Well, the Sergeant is wrong. Grégoire is not deliberately hostile. Sometimes I divine, when he knits his brows, that he is making an effort to resist suffering, to meet it with a stouter and more cheerful heart. But he does not know how to set about it.

If you were asked to lift a railway-engine, you would perhaps make an effort; but you would do so without confidence and without success. So you must not say hard things of Grégoire.

Grégoire is unable to bear suffering, just as one is unable to talk an unknown language. And, then, it is easier to learn Chinese than to learn the art of suffering.

When I say that he is unable to bear suffering, I really mean that he has to suffer a great deal more than others. . . . I know the

human body, and I cannot be deceived as to certain signs.

Grégoire begins very badly. He reminds one of those children who have such a terror of dogs that they are bound to be bitten. Grégoire trembles at once. The dogs of pain throw themselves upon this defenceless man and pull him down.

* * *

A great load of misery is heavy for a man to bear alone, but it is supportable when he is helped. Unfortunately Grégoire has no friends. He does nothing to obtain them, it almost seems as if he did not want any.

He is not coarse, noisy and foul-mouthed, like the rascal Groult who amuses the whole ward. He is only dull and reserved.

He does not often say "Thank you" when he is offered something, and many touchy people take offence at this.

When I sit down by his bed, he gives no sign of any pleasure at my visit. I ask him:

"What was your business in civil life?"

He does not answer immediately. At last

he says: "Odd jobs; I carried and loaded here and there."

"Are you married?"

"Yes."

"Have you any children?"

"Yes."

"How many?"

"Three."

The conversation languishes. I get up and say: "Good-bye till to-morrow, Grégoire."

"Ah! you will hurt me again to-morrow."

I reassure him, or at least I try to reassure him. Then, that I may not go away leaving a bad impression, I ask:

"How did you get wounded?"

"Well, down there in the plain, with the others. . . ."

That is all. I go away. Grégoire's eyes follow me for a moment, and I cannot even say whether he is pleased or annoyed by my visit.

Good-bye, poor Grégoire. I cross the ward and go to sit down by Auger.

* * *

Auger is busy writing up his "book."

It is a big ledger some one has given him, in

which he notes the important events of his life.

Auger writes a round schoolboy hand. In fact, he can just write sufficiently well for his needs, I might almost say for his pleasure.

"Would you care to look at my book?" he says, and he hands it to me with the air of a man who has no secrets.

Auger receives many letters, and he copies them out carefully, especially when they are fine letters, full of generous sentiments. His lieutenant, for instance, wrote him a remarkable letter.

He also copies into his book the letters he writes to his wife and his little girl. Then he notes the incidents of the day: "Wound dressed at 10 o'clock. The pus is diminishing. After dinner Madame la Princesse Moreau paid us a visit, and distributed caps all round; I got a fine green one. The little chap who had such a bad wound in the belly died at 2 o'clock. . . ."

Auger closes his book and puts it back under his bolster.

He has a face that it does one good to look at. His complexion is warm and fresh; his hair

stiff and rather curly. He has a youthful moustache, a well-shaped chin, with a lively dimple in the middle, and eyes which seem to be looking out on a smiling landscape, gay with sunshine and running waters.

"I am getting on splendidly," he says with great satisfaction. "Would you like to see Mariette?"

He lifts up the sheet, and I see the apparatus in which we have placed the stump of his leg. It makes a kind of big white doll, which he takes in both hands with a laugh, and to which he has given the playful name of "Mariette."

Auger was a sapper in the Engineers. A shell broke his thigh and tore off his foot. But as the foot was still hanging by a strip of flesh, Auger took out his pocket-knife, and got rid of it. Then he said to his terror-stricken comrades: "Well, boys, that's all right. It might have been worse. Now carry me somewhere out of this."

"Did you suffer terribly?" I asked him.

"Well, Monsieur, not as much as you might think. Honestly, it did not hurt so very, very much. Afterwards, indeed, the pain was pretty bad."

I understand why every one is fond of Auger. It is because he is reassuring. Seeing him and listening to him one opines that suffering is not such a horrible thing after all. Those who live far from the battle-field, and visit hospitals to get a whiff of the war, look at Auger and go away well satisfied with everything: current events, him, and themselves. They are persuaded that the country is well defended, that our soldiers are brave, and that wounds and mutilations, though they may be serious things, are not unbearable.

* * *

Yet pain has come to Auger as to the rest. But there is a way of taking it.

He suffers in an enlightened, intelligent, almost methodical fashion. He does not confuse issues, and complain indiscriminately. Even when in the hands of others, he remains the man who had the courage to cut off his own foot, and finish the work of the shrapnel. He is too modest and respectful to give advice to the surgeon, but he offers him valuable information.

He says:

"Just there you are against the bone, it hurts me very much. Ah! there you can scrape, I don't feel it much. Take care! You're pressing rather too hard. All right: you can go on, I see what it's for. . . ."

And this is how we work together.

"What are you doing? Ah, you're washing it. I like that. It does me good. Good blood! Rub a little more just there. You don't know how it itches. Oh! if you're going to put the tube in, you must tell me, that I may hold on tight to the table."

So the work gets on famously. Auger will make a rapid and excellent recovery. With him, one need never hesitate to do what is necessary. I wanted to give him an anæsthetic before scraping the bone of his leg. He said:

"I don't suppose it will be a very terrible business. If you don't mind, don't send me to sleep, but just do what is necessary. I will see to the rest."

True, he could not help making a few grimaces. Then the Sergeant said to him:

"Would you like to learn the song of the grunting pigs?"

"How does your song go?"

The Sergeant begins in a high, shrill voice:

Quand en passant dedans la plai-ai-ne
On entend les cochons . . .
Cela prouve d'une façon certai-ai-ne
Qu'ils non pas l'trôôô du . . . bouché.

Auger begins to laugh; everybody laughs. And meanwhile we are bending over the wounded leg and our work gets on apace.

"Now, repeat," says the Sergeant.

He goes over it again, verse by verse, and Auger accompanies him.

Quand en passant dedans la plai-ai-ne . . .

Auger stops now and then to make a slight grimace. Sometimes, too, his voice breaks. He apologises simply:

"I could never sing in tune."

Nevertheless, the song is learnt, more or less, and when the General comes to visit the hospital, Auger says to him:

"*Mon Général,* I can sing you a fine song."

And he would, the rascal, if the head doctor did not look reprovingly at him.

It is very dismal, after this, to attend to Grégoire, and to hear him groaning:

"Ah! don't pull like that. You're dragging out my heart."

I point out that if he won't let us attend to him, he will become much worse. Then he begins to cry.

"What do I care, since I shall die anyhow?"

He has depressed the orderlies, the stretcher-bearers, everybody. He does not discourage me; but he gives me a great deal of trouble.

All you gentlemen who meet together to discuss the causes of the war, the end of the war, the using-up of effectives and the future bases of society, excuse me if I do not give you my opinion on these grave questions. I am really too much taken up with the wound of our unhappy Grégoire.

It is not satisfactory, this wound, and when I look at it, I cannot think of anything else; the screams of the wounded man would prevent me from considering the conditions of the decisive battle and the results of the rearrangement of the map of Europe with sufficient detachment.

Listen: Grégoire tells me he is going to die.

I think and believe that he is wrong. But he certainly will die if I do not take it upon myself to make him suffer. He will die, because every one is forsaking him. And he has long ago forsaken himself.

* * *

"My dear chap," remarked Auger to a very prim orderly, "it is no doubt unpleasant to have only one shoe to put on, but it gives one a chance of saving. And now, moreover, I only run half as much risk of scratching my wife with my toe-nails in bed as you do. . . ."

"Quite so," added the Sergeant; "with Mariette he will caress his good lady, so to speak."

Auger and the Sergeant crack jokes like two old cronies. The embarrassed orderly, failing to find a retort, goes away laughing constrainedly.

I sat down by Auger, and we were left alone.

"I am a basket-maker," he said gravely. I shall be able to take up my trade again more or less. But think of workers on the land, like Groult, who has lost a hand, and Lerondeau, with his useless leg! . . . That's really terrible!"

Auger rolls his r's in a way that gives piquancy and vigour to his conversation. He talks of others with a natural magnanimity which comes from the heart, like the expression of his eyes, and rings true, like the sound of his voice. And then again, he really need not envy any one. Have I not said it! He is a prince.

"I have had some very grand visitors," he says. "Look, another lady came a little while ago, and left me this big box of sweets. Do take one, Monsieur, it would be a pleasure to me. And please, will you hand them round to the others, from me?"

He adds in a lower tone:

"Look under my bed. I put everything I am given there. Really, there's too much. I'm ashamed. There are some chaps here who never get anything, and they were brave fellows who did their duty just as well as I did."

It is true, there are many brave soldiers in the ward, but only one Military Medal was given among them, and it came to Auger. Its arrival was the occasion of a regular little fête; his comrades all took part in it cor-

dially, for strange to say, no one is jealous of Auger. A miracle indeed! Did you ever hear of any other prince of whom no one was jealous?

"Are you going?" said Auger. "Please just say a few words to Groult. He is a bit of a grouser, but he likes a talk."

* * *

Auger has given me a lesson. I will go and smoke a cigarette with Groult, and above all, I will go and see Grégoire.

Groult, indeed, is not altogether neglected. He is an original, a perverse fellow. He is pointed out as a curious animal. He gets his share of presents and attention.

But no one knows anything about Grégoire; he lies staring at the wall, and growing thinner every day, and Death seems the only person who is interested in him.

You shall not die, Grégoire! I vow to keep hold of you, to suffer with you, and to endure your ill-temper humbly. You, who seem to be bearing the misery of an entire world, shall not be miserable all alone.

Kind ladies who come to see our wounded and give them picture-books, tri-coloured

caps and sweetmeats, do not forget Grégoire, who is wretched. Above all, give him your sweetest smiles.

You go away well pleased with yourselves because you have been generous to Auger. But there is no merit in being kind to Auger. With a single story, a single clasp of his hand, he gives you much more than he received from you. He gives you confidence; he restores your peace of mind.

Go and see Grégoire who has nothing but his suffering to give, and who very nearly gave his life.

If you go away without a smile for Grégoire, you may fear that you have not fulfilled your task. And don't expect him to return your smile, for where would your liberality be in that case?

It is easy to pity Auger, who needs no pity. It is difficult to pity Grégoire, and yet he is so pitiable.

Do not forget; Auger is touched with grace; but Grégoire will be damned if you do not hold out your hand to him.

God Himself, who has withheld grace from the damned, must feel pity for them.

It is a very artless desire for equality which makes us say that all men are equal in the presence of suffering. No! no! they are not. And as we know nothing of Death but that which precedes and determines it, men are not even equal in the presence of Death.

NIGHTS IN ARTOIS

I

ONE more glance into the dark ward, in which something begins to reign which is not sleep, but merely a kind of nocturnal stupor.

The billiard-table has been pushed into a corner; it is loaded with an incoherent mass of linen, bottles, and articles of furniture. A smell of soup and excrements circulates between the stretchers, and seems to insult the slender onyx vases that surmount the cabinet.

And now, quickly! quickly! Let us escape on tiptoe into the open air.

The night is clear and cold, without a breath of wind: a vast block of transparent ice between the snow and the stars. Will it suffice to cleanse throat and lungs, nauseated by the close effluvium of suppurating wounds?

The snow clings and balls under our sabots. How good it would be to have a game. . . .

But we are overwhelmed by a fatigue that has become a kind of exasperation. We will go to the end of the lawn.

Here is the great trench in which the refuse of the dressing-ward, all the residuum of infection, steams and rots. Further on we come to the musical pines, which Dalcour the miner visits every night, lantern in hand, to catch sparrows, Dalcour, the formidable Zouave, whom no one can persuade not to carry about his stiff leg and the gaping wound in his bandaged skull in the rain.

Let us go as far as the wall of the graveyard, which time has caused to swell like a protuberance on the side of the park, and which is so providentially close at hand.

The old Château looms, a stately mass, through the shadows. To-night, lamps are gleaming softly in every window. It looks like a silent, illuminated ship, the prow of which is cutting through an ice-bank. Nothing emerges from it but this quiet light. Nothing reveals the nature of its terrible freight.

We know that in every room, in every storey, on the level of every floor, young mutilated bodies are ranged side by side. A

hundred hearts send the over-heated blood in swift pulsations towards the suffering limbs. Through all these bodies the projectile in its furious course made its way, crushing delicate mechanisms, rending the precious organs which make us take pleasure in walking, breathing, drinking. . . .

Up there, this innocent joy of order no longer exists; and in order to recapture it, a hundred bodies are performing labours so slow and hard that they call forth tears and sighs from the strongest.

But how the murmurs of this centre of suffering are muffled by the walls! How silently and darkly it broods in space!

Like a dressing on a large inflamed wound, the Château covers its contents closely, and one sees nothing but these lamps, just such lamps as might illuminate a studious solitude, or a conversation between intimate friends at evening, or a love lost in self-contemplation.

We are now walking through thickets of spindle-wood, resplendent under the snow, and the indifference of these living things to the monstrous misery round them makes the impotent soul that is strangling me seem

odious and even ridiculous to me. In spite of all protestations of sympathy, the mortal must always suffer alone in his flesh, and this indeed is why war is possible. . . .

Philippe here thinks perhaps as I do; but he and I have these thoughts thrust on us in the same pressing fashion. Men who are sleeping twenty paces from this spot would be wakened by a cry; yet they are undisturbed by this formidable presence, inarticulate as a mollusc in the depths of the sea.

In despair, I stamp on the soft snow with my sabot. The winter grass it covers subsists obstinately, and has no solidarity with anything else on earth. Let the pain of man wear itself out; the grass will not wither. Sleep, good folks of the whole world. Those who suffer here will not disturb your rest.

And suddenly, beyond the woods a rocket rises and bursts against the sky, brilliant as a meteor. It means something most certainly, and it warns some one; but its coarse ingenuity does not deceive me. No barbarous signal such as this could give me back confidence in my soul to-night.

II

The little room adjoining the closet where I sleep has been set apart for those whose cries or effluvia make them intolerable to the rest. As it is small and encumbered, it will only admit a single stretcher, and men are brought in there to die in turn.

But lately, when the Château was reigning gracefully in the midst of verdure, the centre of the great star of alleys piercing its groves of limes and beeches, its owners occasionally entertained a brilliant society; and if they had under their roof some gay and lovely milk-white maiden, they gave her this little room at the summit of the right wing, whence the sun may be seen rising above the forests, to dream, and sleep, and adorn herself in.

To-day, the façade of the Château seems to be listening, strained and anxious, to the cannonade; and the little room has become a death-chamber.

Madelan was the first we put there. He was raving in such a brutal and disturbing manner, in spite of the immobility of his long,

paralysed limbs, that his companions implored us to remove him. I think Madelan neither understood nor noticed this isolation, for he was already given over to a deeper solitude; but his incessant vociferation, after he was deprived of listeners, took on a strange and terrible character.

For four days and four nights, he never ceased talking vehemently; and listening to him, one began to think that all the life of the big body that was already dead, had fled in frenzy to his throat. For four nights I heard him shouting incoherent, elusive things, which seemed to be replies to some mysterious interlocutor.

At dawn, and from hour to hour throughout the day, I went to see him where he sprawled on a paillasse on the floor, like some red-haired stricken beast, with out-stretched limbs, convulsed by spasms which displaced the dirty blanket that covered him.

He lost flesh with such incredible rapidity that he seemed to be evaporating through the gaping wound in the nape of his neck.

Then I would speak to him, saying things that were kindly meant but futile, because

conversation is impossible between a man who is being whirled along by the waters of a torrent, and one who is seated among the rushes on the bank. Madelan did not listen to me, and he continued his strange colloquy with the other. He did not want us or any one else; he had ceased to eat or to drink, and relieved himself as he lay, asking neither help nor tendance.

One day, the wind blew the door of the room to, and there was no key to open it. A long ladder was put up to the window, and a pane of glass was broken to effect an entrance. Directly this was done, Madelan was heard, continuing his dream aloud.

He died, and was at once replaced by the man with his skull battered in, of whom we knew nothing, because when he came to us he could neither see nor speak, and had nothing by way of history but a red and white ticket, as large as the palm of a child's hand.

This man spent only one night in the room, filling the silence with painful eructations, and thumping on the partition which separated him from my bed.

Listening alertly, with the cold air from the open window blowing on my face, I heard in turn the crowing of the cocks in the village, the irregular breathing of Philippe, sleeping the sleep of exhaustion not far from me, and the blows and the death-rattle of the man who took so long to die. He became silent, however, in the morning, when the wind began to drop, and the first detonation of the day boomed through the vault-like quiet of the darkness.

Then we had as our neighbour the hospital orderly, Sergeant Gidel, who was nearing his end, and whose cruel hiccough we had been unable to alleviate for a week past. This man knew his business, he knew the meaning of probe, of fever, of hardened abdomen. He knew too that he had a bullet in the spinal cord. He never asked us for anything, and as we dared not tell him lies, we were overcome by a kind of shame in his presence. He stayed barely two days in the room, looking with dim eyes at the engravings on the walls, and the Empire bureau on which vases were piled.

But what need is there to tell of all those

whom this unhappy room swallowed up and ejected?

III

We have no lights this evening. . . . We must learn to do without them. . . . I grope my way along the passages, where the wind is muttering, to the great staircase. Here there is a fitful lamp which makes one prefer the darkness. I see the steps, which are white and smeared with mud, pictures and tapestries, a sumptuous scheme of decoration flooded at the bottom by filth and desolation. As I approach the room where the wounded are lying, I hear the calm sound of their conversation. I go in quietly. They cease talking; then they begin to chat again, for now they know me.

At first one can only distinguish long forms ranged upon the ground. The stretchers seem to be holding forth with human voices. One of these is narrating:

"We were all three sitting side by side . . . though I had told the adjutant that corner was not a good place. . . . They had just brought us a ration of soup with a little bit of

meat that was all covered with white frost. Then bullets began to arrive by the dozen, and we avoided them as well as we could, and the earth flew about, and we were laughing, because we had an idea that among all those bullets there was not one that would find its billet. And then they stopped firing, and we came back to sit on the ledge. There were Chagniol and Duc and I, and I had them both to the right of me. We began to talk about Giromagny, and about Danjoutin, because that's the district we all came from, and this went on for about half an hour. And then, all of a sudden, a bullet came, just a single one, but this time it was a good one. It went through Chagniol's head, then through Duc's, and as I was a little taller than they, it only passed through my neck. . . ."

"And then?"

"Then it went off to the devil! Chagniol fell forward on his face. Duc got up, and ran along on all fours as far as the bend in the trench, and there he began to scratch out the earth like a rabbit, and then he died. The blood was pouring down me right and left, and I thought it was time for me to go. I set

off running, holding a finger to each side of my neck, because of the blood. I was thinking: just a single bullet! It's too much! It was really a mighty good one! And then I saw the adjutant. So I said to him: 'I warned you, *mon adjutant,* that that corner was not a good place!' But the blood rushed up into my mouth, and I began to run again."

There was a silence, and I heard a voice murmur with conviction:

"*You* were jolly lucky, weren't you?"

Mulet, too, tells his story:

"They had taken our fire . . . 'That's not your fire,' I said to him. 'Not our fire?' he said. Then the other came up and he said: 'Hold your jaw about the fire . . .' 'It's not yours,' I said. Then he said: 'You don't know who you're talking to.' And he turned his cap, which had been inside out . . . 'Ah! I beg your pardon,' I said, 'but I could not tell . . .' And so they kept our fire. . . ."

Maville remarks calmly: "Yes, things like that will happen sometimes."

Silence again. The tempest shakes the windows with a furious hand. The room is faintly illuminated by a candle which has St.

Vitus' dance. Rousselot, our little orderly, knits away industriously in the circle of light. I smoke a pipe at once acrid and consoling, like this minute itself in the midst of the infernal adventure.

Before going away, I think of Croquelet, the silent, whose long silhouette I see at the end of the room. "He sleeps all the time," says Mulet, "he sleeps all day." I approach the stretcher, I bend over it, and I see two large open eyes, which look at me gravely and steadily in the gloom. And this look is so sad, so poignant, that I am filled with impotent distress.

"You sleep too much, my poor Croquelet."

He answers me with his rugged accent, but in a feeble voice:

"Don't listen to him; it's not true. You know quite well that I can't sleep, and that you won't give me a draught to let me get a real nap. This afternoon, I read a little. . . . But it wasn't very interesting. . . . If I could have another book. . . ."

"Show me your book, Croquelet."

He thrusts out his chin towards a little tract. I strike a match, and I read on the grey

cover: "Of the Quality of Prayers addressed to God."

"All right, Croquelet, I'll try to get you a book with pictures in it. How do you feel this evening?"

"Ah! bad! very bad! They're thawing now. . . ."

He has had frost-bite in his feet, and is beginning to suffer so much from them that he forgets the wound in his side, which is mortal, but less active.

IV

I have come to take refuge among my wounded to smoke in peace, and meditate in the shadow. Here, the moral atmosphere is pure. These men are so wretched, so utterly humiliated, so absorbed in their relentless sufferings that they seem to have relinquished the burden of the passions in order to concentrate their powers on the one endeavour: to live.

In spite of their solidarity they are for the time isolated by their individual sufferings. Later on, they will communicate; but this is the moment when each one contemplates his

own anguish, and fights his own battle, with cries of pain. . . .

They are all my friends. I will stay among them, associating myself with all my soul in their ordeal.

Perhaps here I shall find peace. Perhaps all ignoble discord will call a truce on the threshold of this empire.

But a short distance from us the battle-field has thundered unceasingly for days. Like a noisy, complicated mechanism which turns out the products of its internal activity, the stupid machine of war throws out, from minute to minute, bleeding men. We pick them up, and here they are, swathed in bandages. They have been crushed in the twinkling of an eye; and now we shall have to ask months and years to repair or palliate the damage.

How silent they are this evening! And how it makes one's heart ache to look at them! Here is Bourreau, with the brutal name and the gentle nature, who never utters a complaint, and whom a single bullet has deprived of sight for ever. Here is Bride, whom we fear to touch, so covered is he with bandages, but

who looks at us with touching, liquid eyes, his mind already wandering. Here is Lerouet, who will not see next morning dawn over the pine-trees, and who has a gangrened wound near his heart. And the others, all of whom I know by their individual misfortunes.

How difficult it is to realise what they were, all these men who a year ago, were walking in streets, tilling the land, or writing in an office. Their present is too poignant. Here they lie on the ground, like some fair work of art defaced. Behold them! The creature *par excellence* has received a great outrage, an outrage it has wrought upon itself.

We are ignorant of their past. But have they a future? I consider these innocent victims in the tragic majesty of the hour, and I feel ashamed of living and breathing freely among them.

Poor, poor brothers! What could one do for you which would not be insufficient, unworthy, mediocre? We can at least give up everything and devote ourselves heart and soul to our holy and exacting work.

But no! round the beds on which your solitary drama is enacted, men are still taking

part in a sinister comedy. Every kind of folly, the most ignoble and also the most imbecile passions, pursue their enterprises and their satisfactions over your heads.

Neither the four corpses we buried this morning, nor your daily agonies will disarm these appetites, suspend these calculations, and destroy these ambitions the development and fruition of which even your martyrdom may be made to serve.

* * *

I will spend the whole evening among my wounded, and we will talk together, gently, of their misery; it will please them, and they will make me forget the horrible atmosphere of discussion that reigns here.

Alas! during the outburst of the great catastrophe, seeing the volume of blood and fire, listening to the uproar, smelling the stench of the vast gangrene, we thought that all passions would be laid aside, like cumbersome weapons, and that we should give ourselves up with clean hearts and empty hands to battle against the fiery nightmare. He who fights and defends himself needs a pure heart:

so does he who wanders among charnel houses, gives drink to parched lips, washes fevered faces and bathes wounds. We thought there would be a great forgetfulness of self and of former hopes, and of the whole world. O Union of pure hearts to meet the ordeal!

But no! The first explosion was tremendous, yet hardly had its echoes died away when the rag-pickers were already at work among the ruins, in quest of cutlet-bones and waste paper.

And yet, think of the sacred anguish of those first hours!

* * *

Well, so be it! For my part, I will stay here, between these stretchers with their burdens of anguish.

At this hour one is inclined to distrust everything, man and the universe, and the future of Right. But we cannot have any doubts as to the suffering of man. It is the one certain thing at this moment.

So I will stay and drink in this sinister testimony. And each time that Béal, who

has a gaping wound in the stomach, holds out his hands to me with a little smile, I will get up and hold his hands in mine, for he is feverish, and he knows that my hands are always icy.

V

Bride is dead. We had been working all day, and in the evening we had to find time to go and bury Bride.

It is not a very long ceremony. The burial-ground is near. About a dozen of us follow the lantern, slipping in the mud, and stumbling over the graves. Here we are at the wall, and here is the long ditch, always open, which every day is prolonged a little to the right, and filled in a little to the left. Here is the line of white crosses, and the flickering shadows on the wall caused by the lantern.

The men arrange the planks, slip the ropes, and lower the body, disputing in undertones, for it is not so easy as one might think to be a grave-digger. One must have the knack of it. And the night is very dark and the mud very sticky.

At last the body is at the bottom of the

trench, and the muddy ropes are withdrawn. The little consumptive priest who stands at the graveside murmurs the prayer for the dead. The rain beats in our faces. The familiar demon of Artois, the wind, leaps among the ancient trees. The little priest murmurs the terrible words: *Dies irae, dies illa.* . . .

And this present day is surely the day of wrath . . . I too utter my prayer: "In the name of the unhappy world, Bride, I remit all thy sins, I absolve thee from all thy faults! Let this day, at least, be a day of rest."

The little priest stands bare-headed in the blast. An orderly who is an ecclesiastic holds the end of an apron over his head. A man raises the lantern to the level of his eye. And the rain-drops gleam and sparkle furtively.

Bride is dead. . . .

Now we meet again in the little room where friendship reigns.

Pierre and Jacques, gallant fellows, I shall not forget your beautiful, painful smile at the moment which brings discouragement to the experienced man. I shall not forget.

The beef and rice, which one needs to be

very hungry to swallow, is distributed. And a gentle cheerfulness blossoms in the circle of lamplight, a cheerfulness which tries to catch something of the gaiety of the past. Man has such a deep-seated need of joy that he improvises it everywhere, even in the heart of misery.

And suddenly, through the steam of the soup, I see Bride's look distinctly.

It was no ordinary look. The extremity of suffering, the approach of death, perhaps, and also the hidden riches of his soul, gave it extraordinary light, sweetness, and gentleness. When one came to his bedside, and bent over him, the look was there, a well-spring of refreshment.

But Bride is dead: we saw his eyes transformed into dull, meaningless membranes.

Where is that well-spring? Can it be quenched?

Bride is dead. Involuntarily, I repeat aloud: "Bride is dead."

Have I roused a responsive echo in these sympathetic souls? A religious silence falls upon them. The oldest of all problems comes and takes its place at the table like a familiar

guest. It breathes mysteriously into every ear: "Where is Bride? Where is Bride's look?"

VI

A lantern advances, swinging among the pines. Who is coming to meet us?

Philippe recognises the figure of Monsieur Julien. Here is the man, indeed, with his porter's livery, and his base air as of an insolent slave. He waves a stable-lantern which throws grotesque shadows upwards on his face; and he is obviously furious at having been forced to render a service.

He brandishes the lantern angrily, and thrusts out his chin to show us the advancing figures: two men are carrying a stretcher on which lies a big body wrapped in a coarse winding sheet. The two men are weary, and set the stretcher down carefully in the mud.

"Is it Fumat?"

"Yes. He has just died, very peacefully."

"Where are you going?"

"There is no place anywhere for a corpse. So we are taking him to the chapel in the burial-ground. But he is heavy."

"We will give you a hand."

Philippe and I take hold of the stretcher. The men follow us in silence. The body is heavy, very heavy. We drag our sabots out of the clay laboriously. And we walk slowly, breathing hard.

How heavy he is! . . . He was called Fumat . . . He was a giant. He came from the mountains of the Centre, leaving a red-tiled village on a hill-side, among juniper-bushes and volcanic boulders. He left his native place with its violet peaks and strong aromatic scents and came to the war in Artois. He was past the age when men can march to the attack, but he guarded the trenches and cooked. He received his death-wound while he was cooking. The giant of Auvergne was peppered with small missiles. He had no wound at all proportionate to his huge body. Nothing but splinters of metal. Once again, David has slain Goliath.

He was two days dying. He was asked: "Is there anything you would like?" And he answered with white lips: "Nothing, thank you." When we were anxious and asked him "How do you feel?" he was

always quite satisfied. "I am getting on very well." He died with a discretion, a modesty, a self-forgetfulness which redeemed the egotism of the universe.

How heavy he is! He was wounded as he was blowing up the fire for the soup. He did not die fighting. He uttered no historic word. He fell at his post as a cook. . . . He was not a hero.

You are not a hero, Fumat. You are only a martyr. And we are going to lay you in the earth of France, which has engulfed a noble and innumerable army of martyrs.

The shadow of the trees sweeps like a huge sickle across space. An acrid smell of cold decay rises on the night. The wind wails its threnody for Fumat.

"Open the door, Monsieur Julien."

The lout pushes the door, grumbling to himself. We lay the body on the pavement of the chapel.

Renaud covers the corpse carefully with a faded flag. And suddenly, as if to celebrate the moment, the brutal roar of guns comes to us from the depths of the woods, breaks violently into the chapel, seizes and rattles

the trembling window-panes. A hundred times over, a whole nation of cannon yells in honour of Fumat. And each time other Fumats fall in the mud yonder, in their appointed places.

VII

They ought not to have cut off all the light in this manner, and it would not have been done, perhaps, if . . .

There is a kind of mania for organisation which is the sworn enemy of order; in its efforts to discover the best place for everything, it ends by diverting everything from its right function and locality, and making everything as inopportune as itself. It was a mistake to cut off all the lights this evening, on some pretext or the other. The rooms of the old mansion are not packed with bales of cotton, but with men who have anxious minds and tortured bodies.

A mournful darkness suddenly reigned; and outside, the incessant storm that rages in this country swept along like a river in spate.

Little Rochet was dreaming in the liquid

light of the lamp, with hands crossed on his breast, and the delicate profile of an exhausted saint.

He was dreaming of vague and exquisite things, for cruel fever has moments of generosity between two nightmares. He was dreaming so sweetly that he forgot the abominable stench of his body, and that a smile touched the two deep wrinkles at the corners of his mouth, set there by a week of agony.

But all the lamps have been put out, and the noise of the hurricane has become more insistent, and the wounded have ceased talking, for darkness discourages conversation.

There are some places where the men with whom the shells have dealt mercifully and whose wounds are only scratches congregate. These have only the honour of wounds, and what may be called their delights. . . . But here, we have only the worst cases; and here they have to await the supreme decision of death.

Little Rochet awoke to a reality full of darkness and despair. He heard nothing but laboured breathing round him, and rising

above it all, the violent breath of the storm. He was suddenly conscious of his lacerated stomach, of his lost leg, and he realised that the fetid smell in the air was the smell of his flesh. And he thought of the loving letter he had received in the morning from his four big sisters with glossy hair, he thought of all his lost, ravished happiness. . . .

Renaud hurries up, groping his way among the dark ambushes of the corridor.

"Come, come quickly. Little Rochet has thrown himself out of bed."

Holding up a candle, I take in the melancholy scene. We have to get Rochet into bed again, readjust his bandages, wipe up the fetid liquid spilt on the floor.

Rochet's lips are compressed. I stoop to his ear and ask softly:

"Why did you do this?"

His face remains calm, and he answers gently, looking me full in the eyes: "I want to die."

I leave the room, disarmed, my head bowed, and go in search of Monet, who is a priest and an excellent orderly. He is smoking a pipe in a corner. He has just had news that his

young brother has been killed in action, and he had snatched a few minutes of solitude.

"Monet," I say, "I think Rochet is a believer. Well, go to him. He may want you."

Monet puts away his pipe, and goes off noiselessly.

As to me, I go and wander about outside. On the poplar-lined road, in company with the furious rain and the darkness, I shall perhaps be able to master the flood of bitterness that sweeps over me.

At the end of an hour, my anxiety brings me back to Rochet's bedside. The candle is burning away with a steady flame. Monet is reading in a little book with a clasp. The profile of the wounded man has still the pitiful austerity of a tortured saint.

"Is he quieter now?"

Monet lifts his fine dark eyes to my face, and drops his book.

"Yes. He is dead."

VIII

Why has Hell been painted as a place of hopeless torture and eternal lamentation?

I believe that even in the lowest depths of Hell, the damned sing, jest, and play cards. I am led to imagine this after seeing these men rowing in their galleys, chained to them by fever and wounds.

Blaireau, who has only lost a hand, preludes in an undertone:

Si tu veux fair' mon bonheur. . . .

This timid breath kindles the dormant flame. Houdebine, who has a fractured knee, but who now expects to be fairly comfortable till the morning, at once responds and continues:

Marguerite! Marguerite!

The two sing in unison, with delighted smiles:

Si tu veux fair' mon bonheur
Marguerite! Marguerite!

Maville joins in at the second verse, and even Legras, whose two legs are broken, and the Chasseur Alpin, who has a hole in his skull.

Panchat, the man who had a bullet through his neck, beats time with his finger, because he is forbidden to speak.

All this goes on in low tones; but faces light up, and flush, as if a bottle of brandy had been passed round.

Then Houdebine turns to Panchat and says: "Will you have a game of dummy manilla, Panchat?"

Dummy manilla is a game for two; and they have to be content with games for two, because no one in this ward can get up, and communication is only easy for those in adjacent beds.

Panchat makes a sign of consent. Why should he not play dummy manilla, which is a silent game. A chair is put between the two beds, and he shuffles the cards.

The cards are so worn at the corners that they have almost become ovals. The court cards smile through a fog of dirt; and to deal, one has to wet one's thumb copiously, because a thick, tenacious grease makes the cards stick together in an evil-smelling mass.

But a good deal of amusement is still to be

got out of these precious bits of old pasteboard.

Panchat supports himself on his elbow, Houdebine has to keep on his back, because of his knee. He holds his cards against his chin, and throws them down energetically on the chair with his right hand.

The chair is rather far off, the cards are dirty, and sometimes Houdebine asks his silent adversary: "What's that?"

Panchat takes the card and holds it out at arm's length.

Houdebine laughs gaily.

He plays his cards one after the other, and dummy's hand also:

"Trump! Trump! Trump! And ace of hearts!"

Even those who cannot see anything laugh too.

Panchat is vexed, but he too laughs noiselessly. Then he takes out the lost *sou* from under his straw pillow.

Meanwhile, Mulet is telling a story. It is always the same story, but it is always interesting.

An almost imperceptible voice, perhaps Legras', hums slowly:

Si tu veux fair' mon bonheur.

* * *

Who talks of happiness here?

I recognise the accents of obstinate, generous life. I recognise thine accents, artless flesh! Only thou couldst dare to speak of happiness between the pain of the morning and that of the evening, between the man who is groaning on the right, and the man who is dying on the left.

Truly, in the utmost depths of Hell, the damned must mistake their need of joy for joy itself.

I know quite well that there is hope here.

So that in hell too there must be hope.

IX

But lately, Death was the cruel stranger, the stealthy-footed visitor. . . . Now, it is the romping dog of the house.

Do you remember the days when the human

body seemed made for joy, when each of its organs represented a function and a delight? Now, each part of the body evokes the evil that threatens it, and the special suffering it engenders.

Apart from this, it is well adapted for its part in the laborious drama: the foot to carry a man to the attack; the arm to work the cannon; the eye to watch the adversary or adjust the weapon.

But lately, Death was no part of life. We talked of it covertly. Its image was at once painful and indecent, calculated to upset the plans and projects of existence. It worked as far as possible in obscurity, silence and retirement. We disguised it with symbols; we announced it in laborious paraphrases, marked by a kind of shame.

To-day Death is closely bound up with the things of life. And this is true, not so much because its daily operations are on a vast scale, because it chooses the youngest and the healthiest among us, because it has become a kind of sacred institution, but more especially because it has become a thing so ordinary that it no longer causes us to suspend our

usual activities, as it used to do: we eat and drink beside the dead, we sleep amidst the dying, we laugh and sing in the company of corpses.

And how, indeed, can it be otherwise? You know quite well that man cannot live without eating, drinking, and sleeping, nor without laughing and singing.

Ask all those who are suffering their hard Calvary here. They are gentle and courageous, they sympathise with the pain of others; but they must eat when the soup comes round, sleep, if they can, during the long night; and try to laugh again when the ward is quiet, and the corpse of the morning has been carried out.

Death remains a great thing, but one with which one's relations have become frequent and intimate. Like the king who shows himself at his toilet, Death is still powerful, but it has become familiar and slightly degraded.

Lerouet died just now. We closed his eyes, tied up his chin, then pulled out the sheet to cover the corpse while it was waiting for the stretcher-bearers.

"Can't you eat anything?" said Mulet to

Maville. Maville, who is very young and shy, hesitates: "I can't get it down."

And after a pause, he adds: "I can't bear to see such things."

Mulet wipes his plate calmly and says: "Yes, sometimes it used to take away my appetite too, so much so that I used to be sick. But I have got accustomed to it now."

Pouchet gulps down his coffee with a sort of feverish eagerness.

"One feels glad to get off with the loss of a leg when one sees that."

"One must live," adds Mulet.

"Well, for all the pleasure one gets out of life. . . ."

Béliard is the speaker. He had a bullet in the bowel, yet we hope to get him well soon. But his whole attitude betrays indifference. He smokes a great deal, and rarely speaks. He has no reason to despair, and he knows that he can resume his ordinary life. But familiarity with Death, which sometimes makes life seem so precious, occasionally ends by producing a distaste for it, or rather a deep weariness of it.

X

A whole nation, ten whole nations are learning to live in Death's company. Humanity has entered the wild beast's cage, and sits there with the patient courage of the lion-tamer.

Men of my country, I learn to know you better every day, and from having looked you in the face at the height of your sufferings, I have conceived a religious hope for the future of our race. It is mainly owing to my admiration for your resignation, your native goodness, your serene confidence in better times to come that I can still believe in the moral future of the world.

At the very hour when the most natural instinct inclines the world to ferocity, you preserve, on your beds of suffering, a beauty, a purity of outlook which goes far to atone for the monstrous crime. Men of France, your simple grandeur of soul redeems humanity from its greatest crime, and raises it from its deep abyss.

We are told how you bear the misery of the

battle-field, how in the discouraging cold and mud, you await the hour of your cruel duty, how you rush forward to meet the mortal blow, through the unimaginable tumult of peril.

But when you come here, there are further sufferings in store for you; and I know with what courage you endure them.

The doors of the Château close on a new life for you, a life that is also one of perpetual peril and contest. I help you in this contest, and I see how gallantly you wage it.

Not a wrinkle in your faces escapes me. Not one of your pains, not one of the tremors of your lacerated flesh. And I write them all down, just as I note your simple words, your cries, your sighs of hope, as I also note the expression of your faces at the solemn hour when man speaks no more.

Not one of your words leaves me unmoved; there is not one of your actions which is not worthy of record. All must contribute to the history of our great ordeal.

For it is not enough to give oneself up to the sacred duty of succour. It is not enough to apply the beneficent knife to the wound, or

to change the dressings skilfully and carefully.

It is also my mission to record the history of those who have been the sacrificial victims of the race, without gloss, in all its truth and simplicity; the history of the men you have shown yourselves to be in suffering.

If I left this undone, you would, no doubt, be cured as perfectly, or would perish none the less; but the essence of the majestic lesson would be lost, the most splendid elements of your courage would remain barren.

And I invite all the world to bow before you with the same attentive reverence, *with hearts that forget nothing.*

Union of pure hearts to meet the ordeal! Union of pure hearts that our country may know and respect herself! Union of pure hearts for the redemption of the stricken world!

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